Conflict Management: A Tool in Optimizing Effectiveness and Efficiency in Organizational Management

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Abstract: **Conflict is inevitable in the interaction of human beings with one another in any organization around the world. It has come to stay as long as the relationship exists between different personalities. To avoid conflict as a leader may be practically impossible especially if such an organization would be successful in achieving its goals and objectives. What should be paramount in the mind of the leader is how to adequately manage the conflict so that it would not adversely affect the performance of the organization.**

The purpose of this paper is, therefore, to establish the importance of conflict management as a tool in optimizing effectiveness and efficiency in organizational management. The paper takes a look at the major causes of conflicts in organizations; delves into understanding emotional intelligence and its importance in conflict resolutions. Because emotions play a big role in human life, the relationship between emotions and human behavior was also identified.

Conflict management is the independent variable while organizational effectiveness and efficiency is the dependent variable. The organization investigated is one of the faith-based schools in southwest Nigeria. Data collected was analyzed using multiple regression.

The paper affirmed that conflict management is an indispensable tool for organizational efficiency and effectiveness. Hence, strategies such as emotional intelligence among others were recommended to be fully implemented, in the quest to optimize effectiveness and efficiency in organizational performance.

Key Words: **Conflict Management, Tool, Efficiency, Effectiveness, Optimizing, Organizational Management**

I. INTRODUCTION

In all human relationships, conflicts are inevitable. It is the same experience in all organizations because these organizations do not exist in isolation. Human beings are an integral part and as long as people relate with one another, conflicts cannot be avoided. In each organization, conflict is an everyday phenomenon (Turkalji, Fosic, and Dujak, 2008). A lot of working time is spent by managers to deal with conflicts or some other fallouts arising from other humans – related problems (Madalina, 2016). Thakore (2013) believes it is an integral part of our lives.

When conflicts are not properly managed, it consumes so many resources that ordinarily should be diverted to developing the organization. Some of the many negative consequences of not managing conflicts well are reduced efficiency in job performance, reduction in communication among the employees, a fall in motivation, and ultimately, the dissatisfaction of the employees (Turkalji, Fosic, and Dujak, 2008). Conflict can escalate and bring about nonproductive results when not properly managed (Thakore, 2013). However, the author says when properly and adequately managed, conflicts can produce many positive effects that can lead to the optimal performance of the organization. He affirms that an integral part of a high – performance team is learning to manage conflict.

Emotional intelligence plays a key role in human behavior thereby influencing conflict management. When one is emotionally charged, the purpose of managing conflict to achieve reconciliation and restoration cannot be achieved. The conflict may even get worse in such a situation. It is therefore the aim of this paper to establish the importance of conflict management as a tool in optimizing effectiveness and efficiency in organizational management.

The objective of the Study

1. To identify the importance of conflict management in optimizing effectiveness and efficiency in the organization.
2. To assess the impact of emotional intelligence on organizational effectiveness and efficiency.
3. To investigate the impact of emotional intelligence on conflict management.

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested in this study

H_{01}: There is no significant impact of conflict management on effectiveness and efficiency in an organization.

H_{02}: There is no significant impact of emotional intelligence on organizational effectiveness and efficiency in an organization.

H_{03}: There is no significant impact of emotional intelligence on conflict management in an organization.

Importance of the study

This study will go a long way to discover and explain the mediating role of emotional intelligence in the management of conflicts and the improvement of organizational effectiveness and efficiency. It will help leaders in educational institutions to deal with administrative problems arising from intra/interdepartmental and employees' conflicts.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Conflict: Towards a Definition

Many definitions have been given to conflict over the years in different literature. For this study, some are listed. Thompson (1998) says that "conflict is the perception of differences of interests among people'' (p.4).

Bisno (1988) defines conflict as:

A process of social interaction involving a struggle over claims to resources, power and status, beliefs, and other preferences and desires. The aims of the parties in conflict may extend from simply attempting to gain acceptance of preference, or securing a resource advantage, to the extremes of injuring or eliminating opponents. (pp. 13-14)

Conflict is one of the main essentials in human social life and is either good or bad (Schellenberg, 1996). Glukman (1906), Gulliver (1963), and Nanda (1994) are all in agreement with the idea that conflict is an integral part of social life and is not possible to have a society without it. Conflict is being in opposition to one another (Thakore, 2013). The author says it is disagreement among people or employees of organizations and that such disagreement is a characteristic attribute in the relationships among all human beings.

Causes of Conflict

For conflicts to be adequately managed among various teams in organizations, managers and other leaders must identify the causes. Several scholars have identified causes of conflict; but for this study, that of Capozzoli (1995) will be considered. According to him, there are seven main causes of conflicts which are:

1) Team members come along with culturally different values to the wok teams.
2) Team members are endowed with different attitudes which eventually lead to different goals for the members of the team.
3) When the different needs of team members are not met, these result in frustration that aggravates conflict.
4) Conflict arises when the various expectations of team members are not met.
5) Team members give different interpretations of the same information arising from having different perceptions.
6) Struggle with limited resources also causes conflict.

7) Team members with different personalities experience clash with each other and this brings conflict.

Types of Conflict

Following the diverse and different definitions given to conflict, different types of conflict have been identified depending on where it is taking place. Madalina (2016) classify conflict into four main types:

1) Interpersonal conflict - Here is a conflict just between two individuals. It arises basically due to differences between the two people.
2) Intrapersonal conflict – Happens within the mind of an individual. This is a type of psychological conflict affecting the thoughts, values, principles, and emotions of the individual.
3) Intra-group conflicts - This is the conflict happening within the individuals in a team or group. It arises due to the incompatibilities and misunderstanding among the group members.
4) Inter-group conflict – It is experienced anytime there is a misunderstanding among the various teams or groups within an organization.
   Other factors that may enhance this type of conflict are rivalry in resources or the boundaries put in place by a group to others that set up its uniqueness or identity as a group (Denohue and Kott, 1992).

Understanding Emotional Intelligence

The interest in understanding emotional intelligence has been on the increase over the last few decades. This is because leaders at every level of the organization require a toolbox of effective strategies for leading people. Another reason being that everywhere in the world today, people find it difficult to intelligently control emotions and getting along with people in the global community is becoming more important than technical skills. Many definitions have been given to emotional intelligence over the years. Few will be considered for this paper.

Serrat (2009) describes emotional intelligence as "the ability, capacity, skill, or self-perceived ability to identify, assess, and manage the emotions of one's self, of others, and groups" (p.2). The author affirms that people with a high level of emotional intelligence, understand their emotions very well, and also get to know the emotions of others.

Mayer, Salovey & Caruso (2004) define emotional intelligence:

As the capacity to reason about emotions, and of emotions to enhance thinking. It includes the abilities to accurately perceive emotions, to access and generate emotions to assist thought, to understand emotions and emotional knowledge, and to reflectively regulate emotions to promote emotional and intellectual growth. (p. 197)

Caruso (2017) opines that emotion here refers to the state of feeling which includes physiological responses and cognitions that transmit information about relationships. According to him, happiness and fear are two different states of feelings that convey information about relationships. While the first feeling would likely join others, the second would run away. In this definition, intelligence is the ability to reason accurately about information.

One of the most respected leading authorities on emotional intelligence Daniel Goleman in his book *Emotional Intelligence: Why it matters more than IQ* says the most important thing in leadership is emotional intelligence.

He identifies five major components of emotional intelligence which are:

1) Self-Awareness - One's ability to be able to recognize and understand personal moods, emotions, and drives including their impact on others. The attributes or skills are emotional awareness, accurate assessment, and self-confidence.
2) Self-Regulation – This is the ability to be able to control or change the course of impulses, moods, and having the natural tendency to have disruptive judgment put on hold and to think before acting. The attributes or skills are self-control, trustworthiness, conscientiousness, adaptability, and innovativeness.
3) Self-Motivation - Here is the burning passion to work not just for money but for internal resources like external rewards. The attributes or skills are achievement drives, commitment, initiative, and optimism.
4) Social Awareness - Having the ability to comprehend the emotional makeup of others by treating them based on their emotional reactions. The attributes or skills are empathy, service orientation, developing others, leveraging diversity, and political awareness.
5) Social Skills - Having expertise in managing relationships and building networks in addition to being able to find a common ground and build relationships. The attributes or skills are influence, communication, leadership, change catalyst, conflict management, and building bonds.

Through the development of emotional intelligence, people can become more productive and successful in various organizations and also help others to be more productive and achieve success (Serrat, 2009).

Relationship between Emotions and Human Behavior

The role of emotion in human behavior cannot be underestimated. Zhu and Thagard (2002) agree that emotion can influence action generation, action execution, control, and play a key role in the explanation of behavior. The authors posit that emotional regulation is a common phenomenon in everyday activities. Gross (1998) have earlier observed that increased recognition is being given to emotion regulation as

an important skill in coping with social and personal problems. Two theories are known for this relationship between emotions and human behavior. In the first one, emotion is directly related to behavior; that is emotion directly causes behavior. Under this theory, individual actions are as a result of one's emotional state. By this, the emotional state of an individual causes him or her to behave in a particular manner.

In the second theory, the relationship between emotion and behavior is indirect. The theory holds that emotion only comes after the behavior. After reflecting on the behavior and the consequences, the individual seems to learn some lessons that can be useful for the future.

Emotional Intelligence and Conflict Management Resolution

Having established the fact that all organizations without any exception are susceptible to conflict; this section briefly looks at the relationship between emotional intelligence and conflict management. Moberg (2001) posits that conflict management styles are the various behavioral patterns put into use by individuals when dealing with conflicts. Two main dimensions have been identified by researches for the different styles of managing interpersonal conflicts. One is a concern for self and the other concern for others (Blake Mouton, 1964; Rahire & Bonoma, 1979). According to Vashist, Sinkg, and Shasrma (2018), concern for self is the level to which an individual makes effort to satisfy his or her concern and concern for others is the level to which an individual makes effort to satisfy the concern of others.

These two dimensions according to the authors together produce the different styles of managing conflicts that are integrating, obliging, dominating, avoiding, and compromising. The authors affirm that emotional intelligence is an important antecedent for managing conflicts effectively.

Salovery & Manager (1990) submit that emotionally intelligent people think carefully about their emotions and that of others, differentiate among them to use the information to direct one's thinking and action. Morison (2008) believes that emotional intelligence is capable of providing individuals with skills to manage interpersonal conflict. Vashisht, Singn, and Sharma (2018) submit that emotional intelligence is linked with a higher level of conflict resolution skills that bring about effective conflict management. According to the authors, individuals with a high level of emotional intelligence work to sustain an interpersonal relationship while those with lower levels of emotional intelligence experience more negative conflict behavior that can adversely affect their relationships.

III. METHODOLOGY

Descriptive design is used to study the characteristics of respondents. This study essentially focuses on the aspects of Conflict Management, Emotional Intelligence and, Organizational Effectiveness, and Efficiency. The study also attempts to find out the behavior of respondents in conflict situations. The sampling frame for the study is the employees

of Babcock University High Schools located in Southwestern Nigeria, which included 190 individuals. The criterion for selection of the sample was that the employee should have a minimum one year of working experience and must be a permanent employee within the age group of 22 – 58 for this study. The researchers used the following instruments in the collection of data: Emotional Intelligence Scale developed by Mehta and Singh (2013); Organizational Effectiveness Scale (OES) developed by Chiyem and Anayo (2016); and Conflict Management Formative Questionnaire developed by Gaumer and Noonan (2018).

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Objective/Hypothesis One

Objective: To identify the importance of conflict management in optimizing effectiveness and efficiency in the organization.

Hypothesis: There is no significant impact of conflict management on effectiveness and efficiency in an organization.

Table 1: Importance of conflict management in optimizing effectiveness and efficiency in an organization

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	57.465	3.180		18.069	.000
	Conflict management	.181	.042	.302	4.340	.000
a. Dependent Variable: Organizational Effectiveness and efficiency						

The results in Table 1 revealed that; conflict management (β = .181; t = 4.340; p < .05) is a good predictor of Organizational Effectiveness and efficiency. The coefficient of conflict management assumes a positive sign and is statistically significant. This implies that conflict management is a tool in optimizing effectiveness and efficiency in an organization. The result conforms to the literature on conflict management which posits the positive impact of conflict management on organizational effectiveness and efficiency because proper conflict management promotes a stable working environment that will encourage organizational performance. Hence, the way an organization resolves conflict has a direct impact on the workplace climate, and in particular on the conflict aspect of this climate (Poitras & Tareau, 2007). Otieno, Waiganjo, and Njeru (2015) establish that effective conflict management can lead to high organizational effectiveness, and the findings of the study confirm the same result in the institution used for this study.

Objective/Hypothesis Two

Objective: To assess the impact of emotional intelligence on organizational effectiveness and efficiency.

Hypothesis: There is no significant impact of emotional intelligence on organizational effectiveness and efficiency in an organization

Table 2: Impact of emotional intelligence on Organizational Effectiveness and Efficiency

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	51.160	2.756		18.567	.000
	Emotional Intelligence	.182	.023	.502	7.952	.000
a. Dependent Variable: Organizational Effectiveness and Efficiency						

The results in Table 2 revealed that; emotional intelligence (β = .182; t = 7.952; p < .05) is a good predictor of organizational effectiveness and efficiency. The findings corroborate earlier study of Masa'deh (2016) that reveals a significant positive impact of emotional intelligence on organizational effectiveness. Also, the study of Ugoani (2016) conforms to this study, he shows that emotional intelligence has a strong positive relationship with organizational competitiveness. These findings are similar to the works of Dong *et al.* (2014); Voss et al. (2006) and Boehm et al. (2015). Again, according to the results of the research, there is a mediator effect of emotional intelligence on the impact of conflict management on organizational effectiveness and efficiency. This result supports the findings of Côté and Miners (2006) that the emotional intelligence has an effect on the organizational effectiveness and efficiency, and besides, it has been shown that this effect can be realized through conflict management.

Objective/Hypothesis Three:

Objective: To investigate the impact of emotional intelligence on conflict management.

Hypothesis: There is no significant impact of emotional intelligence on conflict management in an organization.

Table 3: Importance of emotional intelligence on conflict management

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	42.080	4.960		8.484	.000
	Emotional Intelligence	.216	.041	.357	5.241	.000
a. Dependent Variable: Conflict management						

The results in Table 3 revealed that; emotional intelligence (β = .216; t = 5.241; p < .05) is a good predictor of conflict management. This implies that emotional intelligence has a

significant impact on conflict management resolution. The implication of this is that individuals with sound emotional perception and emotional management skills coupled with personal skills have a better understanding of the situations. They can resolve the conflict by altering their conflict resolution styles (Carmeli *et al*., 2009). Hess and Bacigalupo (2011) propose that organizations and individuals may benefit from the development and utilization of behaviors attributed to emotional intelligence. This result negates the study of Ashkanasy and Daus (2002), and Bodtker and Jameson (2001) which advocate that workplace conflict and emotions have a negative link. They argue that as conflict is related to stress and pressure, it escalates emotional response and negative stimulation but this is ascribed to those that have low emotional intelligence. However, Lubit (2004) has stated that high emotional intelligence is a competency that increases the individual's capability to deal with "toxic" managers through enhanced conflict resolution skills.

V. CONCLUSION

This study was descriptive concerning establishing conflict management as a tool for optimizing effectiveness and efficiency in organizational management. Limitations to the study were due to the relative complication of the questionnaire and the ability of all employees to complete it. The organizations are more and more recognizing the importance of conflict management at the workplace as employees encounter various degrees of conflict. The study reveals that conflict management in educational institutions impacts positively on organizational effectiveness and efficiency. That is, effective conflict management style reduces crisis in educational institutions. Also, the results suggested a notion that the effectiveness of conflict-handling style does relate to the situation and context of the job environment. This shows that the conflict management strategies in place at the organization have been relatively useful in minimizing the incidence of disruptive conflicts while conflict management strategies have positive impacts on workers' productivity.

However, emotions also can be looked at in terms of goal orientation that contribute to conflict management, organizational effectiveness, and efficiency. The presence of high emotional intelligence among employees in an organization may be viewed as a positive response to organizational effectiveness and efficiency. There are differences of opinions among researchers as to what is the most appropriate model for managing conflicts. However, emotional intelligence competencies can be learned thereby increasing the emotional intelligence staff members in the organization. This study concluded that conflict management is an important tool in optimizing effectiveness and efficiency in an organization. Likewise, emotional intelligence is important in managing conflict and increasing organizational effectiveness and efficiency.

From the findings of the study, it is revealed that institutions wishing to survive in such an intensely competitive environment should invest in emotional intelligence capacity building for their employees periodically.

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