

Chapter 11

Reviewing the Concept of Conflict Management Strategy

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ABSTRACT

This chapter in book reviewed literatures on conflict management strategy in organization and also types of conflicts and how to resolve conflict. It was also concluded that the more traditional leaders and members of the society accommodate, collaborate and reach compromises in conflict situations, the more consolidated and sustainable institutional harmony becomes. It was also concluded that the neglect of conflict resolution strategies such as accommodation, collaboration, and compromise weaken institutional harmony in communal leadership.

INTRODUCTION

The willingness to deal with conflict is a crucial factor in the effectiveness of management. When disputes in educational institutions are handled constructively and efficiently, beneficial results are achieved for the persons involved and for the organization as a whole. Properly defined and managed disputes can help to mitigate the destructive impact of a win-loss situation (Mullins, 2006). Furthermore, effective conflict management will enhance the decision-making process with a range of viewpoints, which can lead to constructive discussions, create potential options and ensure that the issue has been thoroughly studied. There's nothing like conflict-free organisations. But if there are conflict-free organisations, social groups or communities, the outcome would be synergetic effects, such as solidarity, unity and the spirit we feel among individuals. Conflict can be both positive and negative. Management does also not aim to eliminate all disputes. Some can prove beneficial if they are used as a tool for change or innovation. There is an ideal degree of conflict for each organization that can be considered highly functional as it helps to produce positive performance. However, Robbins and Judge (2011) said that conflict can increase organizational effectiveness by promoting change and enhancing the decision-making process. It is therefore an agent of evolution and of internal and external change (Mullins 2006). It also initiates the hunt for new and innovative ways to do things and undermines complacency within the company. Most disputes have not been adequately handled, resulting in negative consequences. Pondy (1990) argues that conflict leads to greater innovation, greater worker enthusiasm or better decision-making. Conflict can break an organization apart by building walls between co-workers that lead to poor performance and even resignation. It can have devastating effects and circumstances that give rise to inefficiency, among others, for individuals and organizations such as basic schools. Conflict resolution is a method of trying to settle a dispute or a conflict. Effective dispute resolution is achieved by listening to the parties concerned offering ways to meet the needs of each side and discussing their interests in an appropriate manner, so that each party is happy with the result. On the other hand, successful dispute resolution can help to recognize previously undetected conflicts and behaviors, help to explain uncertainties and enhance overall cooperation (Evarard, Morris & Wilson 2004).

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Conflict Resolution

Conflict is an inevitable and all-pervasive element in our society and in the world. Although conflicts may end up in destruction and even death, conflicts may also result in increased effectiveness, enhanced relationships, and further goal attainment. Indeed, in human terms conflict is one of the "engines of evolution" that allows us to learn, progress, and grow. Our goal is not to attempt to do away with conflict but rather to skillfully manage conflict to further its constructive potential.

Conflict is a natural part of life and also a natural part of school life. Organizations without conflict will act as possibly stagnant, apathetic, and non-responsive to the need for change. Conflict can serve a valuable purpose by encouraging imaginative solutions to problems. Conflicts call for time and management. Algert and Watson (2002) mentioned that managers invest more than 20% of their time on conflict management or resolution because failure to do so can lead to catastrophic results. Various scholars have explained disputes from interesting perspectives (Kinicki & Kreitner, 2006; Kinard, 1998; Robbins & Judge, 2011). While Kinard sees rivalry between individuals competing for resources, Kinicki and Kreitner and Robbins describe it as perceptions of opposing interests. Others (DeCenzo, 1997 & Bullin, 2001) often see conflict as a clash of expectations, ideals, ideas or personal interests. Similarly, Mullins (2006) argues that conflict is an action designed to hinder the achievement of the interests of some other individual. Obviously, conflict is a process that starts when one person perceives a threat or something that adversely affects what they care about. As a result, teachers in the basic school system face equally obstructive actions when working towards shared objectives such as raising student achievement scores, social and moral education, and citizen education, among others. School conflicts can also be seen between students-teachers, students-students, head teachers-teachers and teachers-teachers (Crenet, 2000; Holton, 1998). Conflict resolution and management are also crucial to organizational/institutional progress, as they help to move the organization forward in circumstances of rapid change and avoid stagnation. Bernard and Abiodun (2014) suggested that Conflict is an inseparable part of people's life. It is a continuous gift of life, although varying views of it may be held. Some may view conflict as a negative situation which must be avoided at any cost. Others may see it as a phenomenon which necessitates management. Still, others may consider conflict as an exciting opportunity for personal growth and so try to use it to their best advantage. Nebgen (1978) asserts that wherever one may fall on this continuum of viewpoints concerning conflict, seldom would one expect to be in a continual state of conflict as the basis for employment.

Since its presence cannot be terminated in human existence, scholars such as Namande (2008); Obegi and Nyamboga (2008), have theorised and conceptualised conflicts and their modes of resolution rather than termination. Therefore, when and whenever any conflict arises, it should be resolved amicably so that parties involved could be at peace with themselves. Conflicts well-managed and resolved can bring about peace and development in cities and their constituent parts especially the residential areas. However, where peaceful measures fail to achieve desired results, aggrieved parties take to violent means as in the case of the Niger Delta Militants who organised protest marches, civil disobedience and armed struggle to pursue a cause of economic and environmental justice in the Niger delta Region (Ikporukpo, 2014).

Conflict is a very dynamic phenomenon which requires a deep knowledge and understanding of how to handle or resolve it in a constructive rather than destructive way (Maiese, 2005). Maiese (2005) identifies two types of knowledge systems: i) expert or *explicit knowledge*, grounded in skills of comprehension, analysis, and application and which results from study, reading, research, training, and focused experience; ii) folk or *implicit knowledge* which refers to everyday commonsense understandings, intuition, and personal experience (Osamba 2001). While contributing to conflict resolution discourse, Robinson (2009:145) states that "conflict is the mother of creativity and creativity is a process of conflict resolution" meaning that conflict enables individuals or groups to think out of the box by creating peaceful solution to a conflicting issue.

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Types of Conflict Resolution Strategies

According to Pruitt and Rubin (1986) as cited in Robinson (2010), further observed that there are several ways of resolving conflict and these include;

- i. Accommodating:** According to Yuan (2007), it is a style that the people involved use the interventions of other parties to resolve their conflict. Yuan (2007) further opined that using this approach the people involved in the conflict are usually not assertive but cooperative. Although, one of the first steps in conflict resolutions is to recognize that a conflict situation exists, don't ignore it since it cannot disappear on its own. Yuan (2007) suggested that the prevalent problem in developing the institutions of conflict control in organization is to develop an action of plan to identify conflicts at its preliminary stage. Conflict situations are commonly allowed to develop to almost unmanageable magnitude before anything is done about them; by this time it is often too late to resolve the conflict by peaceable and technical means.
- ii. Passive-Aggressive:** Passive-aggressive style involve a situation in which People that exhibits passive-aggressive behavior can be passive one minute and in the next second aggressive. Katz and Kahn,(1996) observed that people do and say things indirectly, act powerless to form hostility and then complain to others or act out in subversive ways, for example forget to bring important data to a meeting when it was promised.
- iii. Compromising:** According to Lim and Rashad (2012), this is a clear case of give-and-take situation in which both parties involved in the conflict willingly wish to give up something after negotiation in order to reach an agreement. Also, Yuan, (2010) observed that this compromising style will create I-win and I-lose section to create compromise. Lussier, (2010); Reich, Wagner-Westbrook, and Kressel (2010) and Friedman, *et al*, (2000) also on the issue of compromising style agrees that those engaged in conflict usually change their own opinion either because they found sufficient reasons to do so or simply to avoid continued confrontation. According to Lim and Rashad (2012), one benefit of this style is that conflicts are resolved in short time while the relationships are still maintained. One of the disadvantage of this style is that compromising styles often starts and its consequences will result in (Suboptimum decisions) to another. Lim and Rashad (2012) observed that when management in an organization overuse this style, it may cause some form of greed on the part of the users.
- iv. Avoidance:** Avoidance simply means staying away from conflict. Rahim (2001) opined that people do pretend that everything is okay to the point that if they are openly asked, "Do you have any worry that you want to convey?" they usually responded, 'No'. People who are favored by the use of avoidance style usually do ignore conflict. According to Lim and Rashad (2012), the advantage of this style is that it helps in the maintaining of relationship between managers and subordinates and the weakness of this style is that it does not lead to the resolution of conflict. Montoya-Weiss, and Song (2001), found that using this style can mar relationship within workers.
- v. Collaborating:** Lim and Rashad (2012) sees collaborating style as approach to resolving conflict in the best solution or interest that are agreeable to all parties. It is commonly refers to as problem-solving style. Flanagan and Runde, (2008), observed that using the collaborating style, issues are attended to openly, frankly and neutrally by communicating with all the parties. Montoya-Weiss et al., (2001) confirmed that one of the advantages of using this style is that all the parties in conflicts are usually happy with the final decision.
- vi. Forcing:** Forcing style uses aggressive behavior to solve the conflict among workers in an organization.

The Justice and Peace Nexus

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Justice is vitally linked and inextricably tied to peace. Most conflicts emanate from unjust systems of governance and resource management. In conflict situations, infringements of rights, abuses and atrocities are recurring decimals. There are perpetrators of abuses and victims of injustice and abuses. There cannot be peace without addressing these issues and some elements of punishment, pardon and compensation. Justice enables the easing of pains, grief and abuses of victims, the enthronement of new just, fair and equitable order and the building of a better basis for social harmony and coexistence. Justice can be retributive or restorative.

In retributive justice, perpetrators of crime and abuses are investigated, tried and punished such as being banned from public office even if granted amnesty, while victims of abuses and injustice are compensated or paid reparations. The peace that retributive justice achieves is what Malan (2008:146) describes as negative peace. It has been observed that where retributive justice is sought from rebels, militants and state militaries, the fear of justice sustains continued belligerence and violence.

Restorative justice is based on a system of amnesty, pardon or sometimes punishment through an open Truth and Reconciliation Commission Process. But the ultimate goal is reconciliation, social harmony and the restoration of the dignity and identity of victims, their reintegration to society and the satisfaction of their needs.

Transition from War to Peace

Post conflict transition begins once a settlement occurs. It is a very sensitive and delicate process that requires even more commitment and statesmanship than settlement because it determines whether the settlement and probably peace would be sustained or whether there would be a relapse into hostilities. Post conflict transitions involve comprehensive changes in terms of structures, orientations and attitudes as new institutional forms have to be put in place, and perceptions and orientations need to be altered in order to manage and sustain the provisions of settlement, the requirements of conflict resolution, peaceful co-existence and peace. The planning and conception of post-conflict transitions has to be comprehensive enough to embrace critical issues, which as Malan (2008:141) highlights should include the causes of the tensions and conflicts, the purpose of the conflicts, required changes in the conflict causing situations and the goals of the changes envisaged. The of satisfaction of parties in the post conflict period will depend on the extent of realization of their goals.

A post conflict transition is a broad, but fragile and complex process that involves at once issues of social reconciliation, economic regeneration and poverty alleviation, natural resource management, security and stability and humanitarian assistance to displaced persons, refugees and other vulnerable groups. It embraces the managing, resolving and reconciling of violent inter-group conflicts and socio-political rivalries, and the management of post-conflict economic development. Managing post-conflict situations have tended to involve socio-political engineering, economic recovery and military and security interventions. The socio-political designs or solutions have typically involved inclusive political arrangements such as democracy, elections, inclusive governments, decentralization/autonomy and constitutional reforms. Collier et al. (2006:1-19) have found that post conflict economic growth and economic recovery for example reduces substantially the risk of conflict reversion. Political design while important plays a subsidiary role as compared to international interventions and economic recovery.

Peace and Peace Building

Though peace refers to a relative state of being, tranquility, wholeness and harmony, in conflict studies it denotes the absence of threats, fear, intimidation, brutality and harm. It further denotes the absence of conflicts, violence, war and the conditions that warrant, induce and sustain them such as poverty, injustice, oppression, repression, exclusion, deprivation and discrimination. The issue of peace raises numerous questions such as what kind of peace?, whose peace?, Peace in whose interests and at what terms? There is peace that is merely an interregnum, a cessation of hostile actions and a state of unsecured quiet. There is negative peace and the peace of the graveyard. These kinds of peace are not sustainable.

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Peace Building is the process of facilitating and strengthening enduring peace. There are some components such as preventing the re-occurrence of violence, addressing the social conditions that underpin and cause the conflicts, building institutions that enable sustained resolution and peace and instituting a system of human security.

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