
CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND MANAGEMENT IN ORGANIZATIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA: CHALLENGES AND PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS

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ABSTRACT

This paper is titled, Conflict Resolution And Management in Organizations for Sustainable Development in Nigeria: Challenges And Practical Solutions. The paper highlights conflicts and how to both Resolve and manage them when they occur in organizations. The paper exposes types of conflicts, approaches adopted in handling conflicts, sources of conflicts, etc. Based on the findings, the paper suggests amongst others, that organizational leaders and managers should appreciate the existence of conflicts in any organization and work towards managing conflict if and when they occur; Employee welfare should be taken seriously by management, etc.

Keywords: Conflict Resolution, Management, Organizations, Leaders, Managers.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In industrial relations, the essence of industrial harmony and stability is that all human components involved in the running of an industry, understand the purpose of each other and are able to effectively communicate with one another in a language understood by all and interact freely so that the principal objectives of the industry or organization at any point in time can be achieved.

However, this pure state of harmony scarcely exists in organizations, as grievances between employees and management erode the set objectives of industries. Obviously, in any civil society, with people from different backgrounds, achieving an environment devoid of grudges and grievances is quite difficult. Industrial harmony 'is not the absence of disagreements, but it is when there is an understanding between employers and employees or management and workers that the system is able to achieve set goals. A grievance ensue when an employee becomes dissatisfied with any action or decision affecting him; he then nurses a complaint and when the dissatisfaction becomes very serious or assumes a wider dimension in the view of the worker, that he has to formally express such a dissatisfaction either verbally or in writing, because it has now become a grievance indeed. (Onasanya, 1999). A grievance may not necessarily affect the system in achieving set goal until, it escalate into a conflict.

A grievance is defined as a discontent or dissatisfaction, real or alleged, valid or imaginary and whether expressed or not but arising from matters connected with the employment of workers which the workers think to be unjust and unfair, no matter whether they are right or not. (Onasanya, 1999).

The employer's greatest challenge is to ensure industrial harmony exist since conflicts are prerequisite to failed target, delayed projects and profits. Thus, affecting the major objective of the employer, which is profit making. Sometimes, it may even jeopardize company's interest, because certain contracts are time bound, especially in any serious organization that has certain targets. Any conflict that occurs at the beginning of a new contract has the power to undermine that industry's interest and consequently affects profit margin.

Both labour and management must strive hard, not to allow grievances to escalate into conflicts because it has serious consequences on both industry and the nation. Industrial conflict is a deplorable industrial relations situation either among workers or between

workers as a group and their employers that constitutes what is literarily tagged trade dispute which may result in work stoppage (Ayodele, 1983).

Conflict can be describe as a disagreement among parties or individuals characterize by antagonism and hostility. This is usually fuelled by the opposition of one party to another, in an attempt to reach an objective different from that of the other. Conflict is an expressed struggle between at least two interdependent parties who perceive incompatible goals, scarce resources and interference from others and as a result of human subjectivity of goals and objectives.

In other words; industrial conflict is the inability of parties in a role set to sort out their differences, which may be directly or indirectly related to their organization (Obisi, 1996). Conflict in itself is a struggle or contest; it only occurs when workers and management have incompatible, conflicting or irreconcilable views on issues that lead to conflict. Conflict is normal and it has both negative and positive effects.

It will be erroneous to think or imagine a conflict free industrial society, since the industrial society is operated by individuals from different backgrounds, dreams, targets and aspirations. Until labour and management come to the realization that interdependence and flexibility are a challenge to the growth and survival of industries, and none can remain indifferent and apathetic to the development of each other's counterpart, until this is achieved industrial harmony will remain a mirage.

Conflict or dispute in its meaning is therefore explained by Andesine (2009) in Dapper (2019), as the act of striking together, mutual interference of opposing or incompatible forces, and discord. Anioke (2002) sees it as a difference or disagreement of opinions, ideas or goals between parties, individuals or groups.

It should be noted that organizational disputes are not all about conflicts with leadership or management. Conflict can also be internal; meaning, they can arise among members, among members and leaders, as well as among leaders themselves.

2.0 APPROACHES ADOPTED IN HANDLING CONFLICTS

There are three basic approaches to handling conflicts, which includes:

- i. Conflict Management
- ii. Conflict Resolution
- iii. Conflict Transformation

2.1 CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

Conflict Management refers to a process that will be undertaken for an indefinite period of time (and may not result in a resolution), and is primarily concerned with containing and limiting the conflict.

2.2 CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Conflict Resolution, refers to resolving a conflict in such a way that all parties are satisfied. It includes applying strategies for a total removal of the conflict. In most cases, it require external parties' involvement as mediators in the resolution process.

2.3 CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION

Conflict Transformation, attempts to change the positions and perceptions of the disagreeing parties while improving their communication, dealing with the reasons for the conflict and ultimately, transforming the conflict peacefully. Conflict transformation is therefore, a process of engaging with and transforming the relationships, interest, discourses, and if necessary, the very constitution of the society that supports the continuation of (violent) conflict.

3.0 TYPES OF CONFLICT

Conflict at work occurs at both individual and collective levels, personality and other factors come into play. Experience has shown that, conflict do occur between management, among group of workers and individuals. Conflict could be organized or unorganized; the organized conflict involves a conscious calculative strategy directed towards the transformation strategy or change of an existing state of affairs perceived as the source of discontent. It is usually a group activity, involving deliberate decision taken by the group or representatives of the group. However, the unorganized conflict is usually spontaneous, the individual responds to the situation in the only way open to him, which may result in withdrawal from the source of discontent, or in reaction engaging in sabotage and rudeness.

There are five basic categories of conflicts

- (a) Role conflict
- (b) Interpersonal conflict
- (c) Inter-group conflict
- (d) Intra-personal conflict

(e) Intra-group conflict

(a) Role Conflict:

A role is the pattern of actions expected of a person in activities involving others. A role reflects a person's position in the social system, with it accompanying rights and obligations, power and responsibility. A person experiences role conflict when others' expectations of the person's role are different from that assigned or assumed by the person. This often happens when the roles of individuals or groups are not clearly defined.

(b) Interpersonal Conflicts:

These are more of personality clashes arising from the different temperament of persons working in the industry. It often showcases itself when one's self-image or self-esteem is about to be damaged and the person takes all necessary steps to protect him or herself. When these self-concepts are threatened, serious upsets occur. Interpersonal conflict can easily influence group conflicts and consequently affect organizational interest. However, this kind of conflict has the tendency to improve personal growth or develop relationships with others, especially when the parties are ready to make adjustments.

(c) Inter-Group Conflicts:

Inter-group conflicts are conflicts arising from differences between groups, departments, union and management. Each group tries to undermine the other, gain power, and improve her image. Conflicts develop easily from such causes as different viewpoints, group loyalty and competition for available resources sets in.

(d) Intrapersonal Conflicts:

Intra-personal conflict occurs within an individual. This type of conflict is more psychological involving the individual thoughts, values, principles and emotions. Intrapersonal conflict may start with trivial matters like deciding whether or not to attend a programme, or related functions, to serious issues like choice of career. It is mainly a mind struggle which leads to restlessness, uneasiness, worry, depression and can sometimes lead to suicide. The positive side of this conflict is that, the experience helps an individual in personal growth.

(e) Intragroup Conflict:

This is a type of conflict that happens among individuals within a team. The incompatibilities and misunderstandings among these individuals lead to an intragroup conflict. It arises from interpersonal disagreements such as team members having

different opinions and personalities which may lead to tension or order of presentation of ideas. Members of the team might find the notions presented by the leader as erroneous due to their differences in opinion. Sometimes intra-group conflicts can be helpful in coming up with decisions that will eventually allow them to reach their objectives as a team. However, if the degree of conflict disrupts harmony among the members, then some serious guidance from a different party will be needed to settle it.

3.0 SOURCES OF CONFLICT

One major source of conflict in any organization or system is scarcity of resources. When a resource that may provide for the common good of all parties is in limited quantity or supply, interested parties may desire to use different approaches in distribution, which may not be fair.

The tendency is that, the more powerful party might use their position in the organization to advantage. Though, the less privileged group can pretend to respect the views of the powerful party, but that has not resolved the conflict. Grievances may be harboured, in the event of a similar occurrence conflict may arise.

American Psychologist Daniel Katz, identified three main sources of conflict;

- i. Economic Conflict: It is brought about by limited resources. Each individual or group get into the conflict, with the aim to attain more of the resources than the other party.
- ii. Value Conflict: This occurs when the parties involved have divergent ideologies and preferences as their principles. Each party tends to stress the advantages of their ideologies against the other. Conflict driven by values of parties can easily escalate.
- iii. Power Factors: This occurs when each party tends to maximize their influence in the social setting. It occurs between individuals, groups, communities and even nations.

Other factors that lead to conflict includes;

(a) Poor Assessment of Grapevine and Rumours

A grapevine is the communication system of informal organizations. It co-exists with management's formal communication system. Since grapevine arises from social interaction, it is fickle, dynamic and varied as people are, but it is a natural activity, an

expression of workers freedom of speech. Wherever people gather, grapevine will raise its head. It can develop in different forms, but management must be tactical in handling such activities.

Grapevine gives manager's reasonable feedback about employees and their jobs and also help to interpret management formal orders into employee language. Rumour is grapevine information that is communicated without secure standards of evidence of being present (Keith Davis, 1983). It is the unverified and untrue grapevine. When false information about management policies increase and grapevine, taking the form of rumour, a good management needs to respond.

Abraham Lincoln once said that;

Public sentiment is everything, with public sentiment nothing can yield, and without it nothing can succeed. When public sentiments about an issue is gathering momentum, a good management has to respond, non-action can trigger avoidable crises.

(b) Misunderstanding/Misinterpretation of Collective Agreements

When collective agreements are reached, it is necessary to interpret the intention, workings and proper applications of these agreements without ambiguity. A misunderstanding or misinterpretation of any section by either party can lead to serious conflicts. Such misinterpretation may lead to accusation, character assassination, mutual suspicion, slander etc., which are not convenient for normal human relation and as such jeopardize industrial harmony, because both can no longer co-operate for industrial activity.

(c) Inconsistency in Reward System

Normally, a company's reward system need to follow laid down procedure, but in practice, events may swing either in favour or against certain individuals or group. When such inconsistencies are observed, perhaps due to prejudice, grievances develop. In most cases, these affected or denied parties may look for sympathy. As inconsistency persist in the system, it will gather momentum, more aggrieved persons begin to join, such opinions can develop into a major source of conflict. For example, if a particular year evaluation is tailored towards number of years served, followed by performance the next year, those denied promotion the previous year based on number of years of service may become aggrieved, because it has the tendency to change organizational hierarchy.

Workers informal Job hierarchy

Accountant

Public Relation Officer

Accountant

Public Relation Officer

Management's formal Job hierarchy

Accountant

Public Relation Officer

Accountant

Public Relation Officer

Fig 1: Differences in workers and management job value

(d) Management Decision Making Mode

Today's world is highly dynamic, what seems to be the best approach few months ago, can become obsolete. Management decision in most industries worldwide, now recognize that management functions, involves coordinating multi-disciplinary (task) projects. Thus, there are weaker attachments to superior- subordinate type of relationship as against stronger project team relationship. Therefore, in decision making, especially such as affect workers, union executive/management committee decision making receives wider acceptance as against directive planning mode Involving principal actors such as union executives reduces conflicts.

When people are part of a decision process, they are committed to its fulfillment even in the face of stiff opposition and criticism.

If management insists on the old policy of master-servant approach to decision making before an enlightened workforce, conflicts are bound to develop.

4.1 MODES OF MANAGING CONFLICTS

Conflicts as part of human diversity are not completely bad after all. There are positive sides of conflict. The onus is on management to reduce as much as possible the negative aspect of conflicts. The following are common modes of managing conflicts:

(a) Avoiding:

Retreating from a conflict issue. In this mode, a party withdraws either out of fear, respect, or to avoid over heating the system or for feelings of inadequacy to bring about an effective resolution. Withdrawal may either intensify conflict or temporarily allow the parties to rethink and seek better strategies for resolution.

(b) Accommodating:

This approach emphasizes common area of interest and de-emphasizes areas of differences. It draws the attention of parties away from the issue at stake while presenting areas of co-operation.

(c) Compromising:

This approach involves bargaining and searching for solutions that brings some level of satisfaction to the parties. In most cases, one party makes concession out of pressure and become dissatisfied with the outcome after all.

(d) Competing:

Persons who are given to extreme viewpoints tend to apply this approach. -A party forces its viewpoint on the other, it is characterize by win lose approach to conflict resolution.

(e) Collaborating or Confrontation:

It involves a rational problem-solving approach. Both parties solve differences by focusing on the main issues, looking at alternative approaches and selecting the alternative that appeal to disputing parties.

4.2 ROLE OF EMPLOYERS IN MAINTAINING INDUSTRIAL HARMONY

The employer who has the responsibility of making major decisions and policies to achieve company's goals must play dominant roles in ensuring industrial harmony. The challenge before management is the ability to harmonize the tripartite views and goals from major players, government, employer's and union. Here are few tit bits on what employers need to do in achieving industrial harmony;

(a) Regular Consultation:

Obviously, every individual wants others to consider him as important, thus if management recognize the role of union or workers representatives and engage them regularly for talks, grievances may reduce. Apart from making union feel important it creates room for friendship which reduces grudges and conflict. Industries can form congregation or similar forum where management and senior staff, may meet

occasionally. Interactions of such can trigger harmony because most rumours and misinterpretations will be cleared.

(b) Worker Education:

Education is the systematic and continuous way of instructing a person with a view to imparting knowledge into such a person so as to develop him mentally, physically and spiritually. Experience has shown that most workers (even union leaders) don't know their rights and duties in the industry. As such, they engage management at the slightest provocation. Educating workers will reduce conflict to a large extent in industries.

(c) Effective Communication:

Communication is the passing of information from one person (or group) to another (or-group) so that both sides understand the message or information being passed the same way. It is necessary for the employer to communicate with the workers so that they may know what functions to perform and how to perform them. When workers are well informed about company's objectives, rules are obeyed. *According to Harold Norcross, if a faire picture is put across regularly, most people like to know what is going on, especially if it is likely to affect their livelihood. If they are not told the facts, they will make with rumours as substitutes; and false rumours spread in a business like fire in a petrol dump.*

Once workers understand management intentions, they may be ready to pay necessary sacrifices to ensure harmony.

(d) Respect for Collective Agreements:

Bargaining in good faith has become a problem, and trust is proving to be elusive. Entering into agreements with the intention not to respect them undermines any system of collective relations. Both management and government are aware that collective agreements are not enforceable by law, hence they have exploited the situation to a great extend in the industry. Such motives undermine industry harmony. Employers must know that conflicts increase industry liabilities, reducing conflicts is an asset to the employer with maximal profits.

(e) Faulty Rewarding style:

Management has the duties of rewarding deserving staff. Issues like staff performance evaluation, training or staff appraisal must follow laid down procedures. If staff evaluations are over politicized or does not reflect the workers contribution. It may lead

to grievances capable of escalating into conflicts. However, if staff evaluation style is fair to all and hard-working staff are rewarded accordingly, the system will experience relative harmony.

(f) Use of Experienced Negotiators:

Negotiation is a process of interaction between parties directed at reaching some form of agreement that will hold and which is based upon common interest, with the purpose of resolving conflict, despite widely dividing differences (Spoelstra et al, 2003). The aim of the process, so far as employee representatives are concerned is partly to achieve a workable relationship with management, founded on mutual respect for each other's position and status. While on their own part, management representatives tend to see the whole process as one method of attaining corporate objectives relating to pay and the conduct of employee relations. (Otobo, 2004). These are two divergent goals from both sides. However, experience has shown that negotiators do not make final decisions, union may reject leaders' position, but more especially, management representatives must be experienced in handling the process because rejection is a common occurrence, especially where government is involved. Use of experienced hands can reduce such rejections that undermine harmony.

5.0 WAYS OF RESOLVING CONFLICTS AT THE WORKPLACE

Conflicts rise silently and slowly, but as part of human nature, we would hesitate to act until a crises confronts us (Romans, P. A. 2007). Better still prevention stands tall against resolution. Conflict resolution is a variety of approaches aimed at terminating conflict through the constructive solving of problems, distinct from management or transformation of conflict. The approaches are aimed at addressing the remote and immediate sources and causes of a particular conflict in order to properly resolve it to forestall future reoccurrence (Miller, 2003).

(a) Early Detection/Mediation

Conflicts start silently and slowly, but in most cases, both management and union are hesitant, assuming that all is well. Detecting the warming signs and introducing appropriate mediation techniques solves conflicts. Though early detection is canvassed, detailed discussion is recommended as time may allow.

Mediation may adopt the following steps:

- (i) Try to understand the nature and implications of the conflict, not just the symptoms.

- (ii) Isolate each problem area and deal with each distinctly.
- (iii) Use men of proven integrity, trusted members whose opinions can be respected.
- (iv) Open communication lines with other interested parties.

(b) Set up Steering Committees

Another effective means of conflict resolution is to set up committees to address the situation. A combined Management-Union committee with the sole responsibility of dialoguing, and finding solution to the conflict. The sole purpose of this committee is to prevent escalation. Each of the disputing party contributes to the committee.

- (i) To identify issues behind the conflict
- (i) Identify interested parties including shadow parties
- (ii) Respond to the conflict in a positive manner.

The benefit derivable is that, each member of the committee automatically becomes a representative and voice, for his/her party. As the disputing parties continue to interact, the teething issues, misunderstandings, misinterpretations are gradually resolved and the tension reduces.

(c) Use Managers with Integrity

The hallmark of every lasting relationship, formal or informal is truth and integrity. Mega door of Peachtree City (2004), said;

Integrity is incredibly important and it should be in your spine. You must make sure that you don't have two sets of values, one for yourself and one for your employee.

Trust and confidence building is important in conflict resolution during conflicts or major grievances, but to achieve success, the negotiators must be men of proven integrity. No one has confidence in men without this virtue and it will be near impossible to build confidence in a process driven by personalities without integrity.

DEVELOPMENT/SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The word or term, Development means several things to different scholars in diverse professions. Scholars have agreed over the years, that development is both multifaceted and multi-dimensional.

The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) agrees with the view that human beings should be the central focus of real Development efforts when it argued that people

are the real wealth of a nation; therefore the basic objective of development is to create an enabling environment for people to live long, healthy and creative lives, etc. (Harry, 2009).

In a similar vein seers (1967) posits that, any talk about development should expressly answer the following Questions; what is happening to poverty? What is happening to unemployment? And what is happening to inequality?

Similarly too, Angaye (1995) stated that;

“Development should therefore be seen as improvement in the material, physical, mental spiritual and moral quality of life resulting from rising incomes, the reduction or eradication of poverty, unemployment, unjustified inequalities, provision of better food, shelter, health, education and protection, high self-esteem or respect, increased form of choice and ability to determine one’s own destiny”.

While the main goal of development is to satisfy human needs and aspirations, the report of the world commission on environment and Development of the Brundtland Commission report, 1983 says;

“Sustainable Development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their needs. In essence, sustainable development is a process of change in which the exploitation of resources, the direction of investments and institutional change are all in harmony and enhance both current and future potential to meet human needs and aspirations.

Following the Brundtland conception of the idea of Sustainable Development, the world congress of Architects in 1993, describes Sustainable Development or Sustainability as “meeting our needs today without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. Sustainable Development therefore involves a consideration of three aspects of reality which are; the physical environment, the socio-political and the economic environment.

CONCLUSION

Conflicts are integral part of human interactions, industries or any organization inclusive. The general view about conflict is all about negative consequence as such whenever the word conflicts is used, many observers feels uncomfortable, but without conflict the very essence of human interaction will be boring. However, for the workplace activities to

strive harmoniously, early detection of the warning signs and resolving them in an open-mind dialogue has great advantage. This has to be carried with some form of mutual trust between the parties, involving men of proven integrity. Integrity and trust are major hallmark for all parties to succeed in resolving conflicts.

SUGGESTIONS

Based on all our findings, the following suggestions are necessary;

1. Organizational leaders and managers should appreciate the fact that conflicts and disagreements are an integral part of every organization. Conflicts cannot totally be avoided; but they can be managed.
2. Industrial harmony is not rocket science. It is a deliberate effort put in by both workers and management. This should be done all the time.
3. The organizational structure in every organization should be followed as stipulated. This will avoid unwarranted conflicts.
4. Employee welfare should not be trifled with, by organizations.
5. Both workers and management should constantly attend training, and retraining sessions.

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