
Workplace Conflict Management Strategies and Orgnaizational Performance

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Abstract: *This paper examined work place conflict management strategies and how they affect organizational performance. The study was largely conceptual which is based solely on insights drawn from the analysis of the existing literature of different studies, periodicals and books related to the topic of study. The findings revealed that a good management-work place conflict strategy improves decision outcomes and groups productivity. It was equally revealed that effective conflict resolution strategy ensures good communication, time management, good cooperation and organizational performance. It was also shown that conflict resolution strategy helps to better good human relations between management and staff and reduces late coming, absenteeism and poor attitude of an employee towards work. It was thus concluded that it is very imperative for management of organization to understand their organization and know the strategy or method of conflict resolution to use as to blend with the particular conflict situation.*

Keywords: *Conflict, conflict management, conflict management strategies, organizational performance*

INTRODUCTION

The structurally differentiated character of contemporary work–organizations, whether in the manufacturing or service industry inevitably generates conflicts of interest. These conflicts of interests arise in groups because of the scarcity of freedom, position and resources (Hotepo, Asokere, Abdul-Azeez & Ajemunigbohun, 2010). Workplace conflict is thus endemic despite the best of management practices in organizations and manifests in various forms as an intrinsic and unavoidable feature of employment relationship. It is by nature an ever-present process and more likely to occur in hierarchical organizations where people with divergent view, opinion and background interact. Awan and Anjum (2015) says that properly managed conflict promotes open communication, collaborative decision making, regular feedback, and timely resolution of conflict.

Conflict refers to a situation in which there are incompatible goals, cognition or emotion within or between individuals or groups that led to opposition (Uya, 1992). This definition recognises three basic types of conflict; goal conflict which arises when the desired outcomes are incompatible between groups, cognitive and affective conflict. Cognitive conflict arises as a result of incompatibility of ideas, affective conflict on the other hand usually arise when there is an incompatibility in emotions. Conflict can also arise when two or more values, perspective and

opinions are contradictory in nature and have not been agreed upon. Conflict has both positive and negative effect on organization that is why there is a need for effective conflict management strategy.

Open communication and collaboration enhance the flow of new ideas and strengthen work relationship, which can have a positive effect on employee morale. Regular feedback and timely resolution of conflict has the potential of improving employee satisfaction and job performance. It is on the background that Awan and Anjum (2015) asserted that a negative work environment that does not promote conflict resolution can result in poor employee behavior and job performance. Unmanaged conflict promotes dysfunctional communication and poor behavior among staff. Poor behavior on the part of one employee has the power to affect overall employee morale, which results in lower productivity. According to Dana (2000), "conflict is not just an annoyance. It costs money and those costs can be calculated, in terms of wasted time, bad decision, lost employees." In the health care industry, patients' health and even their lives can be affected by unmanaged conflict.

Awan and Ibrahim (2015) contend that if the individuals do not have the communication or inter-personal skills to resolve their disputes, the conflict can grow and spread to others, eventually affecting their job performance, which, in turn, affects the job satisfaction of others, as well in addition to the staff not having the communication skills to address their disputes, their leaders often lack the necessary skills to be effective in conflict resolution. Once human resources personnel are involved, the process becomes punitive and results in disciplinary action, which contributes to an even greater reduction in employee morale and employee satisfaction. Within any organization, there are usually different positions and jobs. People occupying these positions have different perceptions, goals, thought and concerns. It is difficult to conceptualize society or an organization without inherent differences and contradictions and these leads to conflict.

Akanji (2005) opined that constructively managed conflict induces a positive performance, while destructively managed conflict heats up the work environment to bring about dislocation and polarization of the entire group with reduction in productivity and job performance. This is suggestive that a well-managed conflict aims at the improvement of organizations for the purpose of stimulating performance in the work-situation. Through good conflict management strategies, weaknesses in the organizational decision-making are exposed which may prompt the establishment to effect changes and search for positive solutions. Hence, management are duty bound to resolve conflict properly for the sake of increasing organizational performance, because the outcome of such action will result in good communication, time management, good cooperation and increase corporate productivity (Obasan, 2011).

However, conflict in work-relations is not an aberration, since it creates or provides an opportunity for correction and reconciliation for the betterment of both the organization and the workers (Osad & Osas, 2013). According to Kazimoto (2013), workplace conflict is described as the presence of discord that occurs when goals, interests or values of different individuals or groups are incompatible and frustrate each other's attempt to achieve objectives in an organization. It is a communication process and an inevitable consequence of transactional relationship manifesting in disagreement and dissonance with and between individuals and groups in the work-environment.

Conflict management refers to attempt to control or regulate conflict through a number of measures. Conflict management strategies refer to the internal mechanisms used by the various

authorities in resolving conflict (Adeyemi and Ademilua, 2012). Albert (2001) averred that there are productive and destructive conflicts. A conflict is said to be positive when it is constructively discussed by the parties and amicable terms for settlement reached. Constructively managed conflict induces a positive performance while poorly managed conflict heats up the environment to bring about 'dislocation of the entire group and polarization, reduced productivity on job performance, psychological and physical injury, emotional distress and inability to sleep, interference with problem activities, escalation of differences into antagonistic position and malice and increased hostility (Akaniji, 2005). Through conflict management a cooperative atmosphere is created for promoting opportunities and movement directed towards non-violent, reconciliation or basic clashing interest (Uchendu, Anijaobi & Odigwe, 2013).

Awan and Anjum (2015) argue that a negative work environment that does not promote conflict resolution can result in poor employee behavior and job performance. Unmanaged conflict promotes dysfunctional communication and poor behavior among staff. Poor behavior on the part of one employee has the power to affect overall employee morale, which results in lower productivity. According to Dana (2000), "conflict is not just an annoyance. It costs money and those costs can be calculated, in terms of wasted time, bad decision, lost employees." In the health care industry, patients' health and even their lives can be affected by unmanaged conflict. With the permanent nature of conflict in work-relations, high performance organizations will be those that may constantly develop the appropriate methods of managing conflict to achieve set-standards and goals. As is now established, the Nigerian organizations have for a long time been concerned with the effect of conflict management on business performance in the country. However, empirical validation of findings across industries is very limited at best. The available few studies within the country have concentrated mainly on other conflict management approaches. But this study tends to focus on accommodation, conciliation an alternative dispute resolution (ADR). Thus, the broad objective of this empirical study is to explore the impact of workplace conflict management strategies on organizational performance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Foundation

This study will anchor on early conflict management model. This theory was propounded by Blake and Mouton in 1964. The theory explained styles for handling interpersonal conflicts into five types: forcing, withdrawing, smoothing, compromising, and problem solving. In the 1970's and 1980's, researchers began using the intentions of the parties involved to classify the styles of conflict management that they would include in their models. The model based on the concerns of the parties involved in the conflict. The combination of the parties concerned for their own interests (that is, assertiveness) and their concern for the interests of those across the table (that is, cooperativeness) would yield a particular conflict management style. Pruitt called these styles yielding (low assertiveness/high cooperativeness), problem solving (high assertiveness/high cooperativeness), inaction (low assertiveness/low cooperativeness), and contending (high assertiveness/low cooperativeness). Pruitt argues that problem-solving is the preferred method when seeking mutually beneficial options. The relevance of the theory to the study is that it stresses on ways of handling conflicts in an organization.

Workplace Conflict

Akanji (2005) in Olukayode (2015) opined that constructively managed conflict induces a positive performance, while destructively managed conflict heats up the work environment to bring about dislocation and polarization of the entire group with reduction in productivity and job performance. This is suggestive that a well-managed conflict aims at the improvement of organizations for the purpose of stimulating performance in the work-situation. Through good conflict management strategies, weaknesses in the organizational decision-making are exposed which may prompt the establishment to effect changes and search for positive solutions. Hence, management are duty bound to resolve conflict properly for the sake of increasing organizational performance, because the outcome of such action will result in good communication, time management, good cooperation and increase corporate productivity (Obasan, 2011). Awan and Ibrahim (2015) contend that if the individuals do not have the communication or interpersonal skills to resolve their disputes, the conflict can grow and spread to others, eventually affecting their job performance, which, in turn, affects the job satisfaction of others, as well in addition to the staff not having.

Conflict management involves implementing certain strategies to eliminate the negative aspects of conflict, increase the positive aspects of conflict and to enhance performance and effectiveness in an organised setting (Edwin, 2013). Further, conflict management serves the role of enabling groups develop conflict resolution skills such as managing conflict, finding self-awareness about the types of conflict and effectively communicating while in conflict with a team member. As a result, conflict management, when implemented within the organisation, reduces the levels of employee dissatisfaction, high employee turnover and absenteeism and increases productivity, creativity and innovation hence the organization can gain a strategic management.

The communication skills to address their disputes, their leaders often lack the necessary skills to be effective in conflict resolution. Once human resources personnel are involved, the process becomes punitive and results in disciplinary action, which contributes to an even greater reduction in employee morale and employee satisfaction. Within any organization, there are usually different positions and jobs. People occupying these positions have different perceptions, goals, thought and concerns. It is difficult to conceptualize society or an organization without inherent differences and contradictions and these leads to conflict. In organization a serious problem can be conflicts that are very serious. This is the bad practice that will be impossible for the workers to at the same place for work. With the permanent nature of conflict in work-relations, high performance organizations will be those that may constantly develop the appropriate methods of managing conflict to achieve set-standards and goals. As is now established, the Nigerian organizations have for a long time been concerned with the effect of conflict management on business performance in the country. However, empirical validation of findings across industries is very limited at best (Olukayode, 2015).

Workplace Conflict Management Strategies

Accommodating Strategy

The Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument illustrates that of the five conflict styles, accommodating or harmonizing, is viewed as the "peacekeeper" mode as it focuses more on preserving relationships than on achieving a personal goal or result. However, in a dispute this creates a lose/win relationship where the accommodating party may make a choice to acquiesce

to the needs of the other, sometimes out of kindness and sometimes to avoid conflict or stress. "Giving in" and letting the other person "take" is the result when this choice is made. While this may be seen as a weak or non-productive position there are situations when this approach is preferable and will gain more for a person than by taking a strong position. It can be both a productive and unproductive strategy in the "give and take" process (Thomas & Kilmann, 1976).

Accommodating involves minimising or suppressing real or perceived differences while focusing on the other's views of the situation. A manager using accommodating style of conflict management has more concern for the needs of the other party than his own. According to Schermerhorn (2000) cited in Momanyi and Juma (2016), a person using accommodating style of conflict management tends to be co-operative but assertive. They agree to the wishes of others, smoothing over or overlooking differences to maintain harmony. Accommodation results in a lose-win solution and a good relationship between parties are created. According to Hellriegel and Slocum (1996) cited in Momanyi and Juma (2016), this relationship is created when people appeal for co-operation and try to reduce tension and stress by offering reassurance and support for the other person's views.

Conciliation

Conciliation is a process that entails a third party seeking to bring the disputants together to settle the conflict/dispute. To resolve a dispute/conflict the conciliator tries to facilitate communication between the parties within the seven days as stipulated by the law. The procedure may, like negotiation, not be governed by laid down procedural rules. Often conciliation will not necessarily focus on settlement; rather it may focus on the sharing of information and identification of issues and options for settlement (Elliot, 2015). This procedure involves building a positive relationship between the parties of dispute (Sgubini, 2004 cited in Nsirimovu, 2017). A 'conciliator' is a neutral person that assists the parties by driving their negotiation and directing them towards a satisfactory agreement. It useful where there is a need to build satisfactory relationships. The conciliator works under a procedural on how to secure settlement and must demonstrate impartiality in settlement of disputes. The conciliators are given seven days to achieve result, although the time can be extended.

ADR Alternative Dispute Resolution

ADR is commonly defined as any process or procedure for resolving a dispute other than adjudication by a judge in a statutory court (ADB, 2002), cited in The World Bank Group (2011). The consensual nature of either opting for dispute resolution or deciding the outcome of a dispute by the parties is a cornerstone element of ADR. Because it encompasses a large number of different methods for dispute resolution, we draw upon a set of general indicators, as well as some historical background to equip the reader with a tangible conceptual understanding of alternative dispute resolution, The World Bank Group (2011). Achieving equity, efficiency and expertise outside formal, established courts through alternative means is not a recent idea. Early forms of conciliation and amicable settlement at the roots of modern-day ADR already reveal its primary motivation realizing equity between two fighting parties. Seeking compromise by moderating contradictive or competing interests reflects the human preference for reconciliation over confrontation. In avoiding open dispute and the often violent consequences of coercive force in executing a judicial decision disputing parties tend to recognize the advantage of pursuing commonalities rather than differences. This is often helped by the technical, expert-

based nature of alternative dispute resolution. More efficient, ADR also enjoys economic advantages over formal court proceedings, being typically more expeditious and less costly than court proceedings, The World Bank Group (2011).

Organizational Performance

The term “performance” is often used to assess the work done by an enterprise and to assess competitiveness. In literature there is a unified vision about performance concept and especially the business performance concept. Definitions of this concept may be abstract, general, less defined, or clearly defined. Organization performance has been the most important issue for every organization be it profit or non-profit one. It has been very important for manager to know which factor influence an organization’s performance in order for them to take appropriate step to initiate them. However, defining, conceptualizing and measuring performance have not been easy task. Researchers among themselves have different opinion and definition of performance which remains to be a continues issues organizational researchers (Barney, 2008). For example, according Javier (2007), as cited in Nikbin *et al* (2010), performance is equivalent to famous three Es (ie economy, efficiency and effectiveness of a certain program or activity). According to Farlex (2012), it is the actual output/results of an organisation obtained when measured against its intended outputs (goals and objectives). Richard et al. (2009) as cited in Raja, Furqan and Muhammad (2011) propose that organizational performance encompasses three specific areas of organizations’ outcomes financial performance (profits, return on assets, return on investment, etc.); product market performance (sales, market share, etc.); and shareholder return performance (total shareholder return, economic value added, etc.), which are the three primary outcomes of corporate organisations being analyzed. However, production capacity performance is another factor of analysis for organizations.

Measures of Organisational Performance

Productivity

Keitany and Riwo-Abudho (2014) defined productivity as an economic measure of output per unit of input. Inputs include labor and capital, while output is typically measured in revenues and other components such as business inventories. Productivity measures may be examined collectively (across the whole economy) or viewed industry by industry to examine trends in labor growth, wage levels and technological improvement. Besides that, Tikkala (2012) defined productivity as ability of an organization to utilize its available resources in order to produce profitable goods or services as desired by customers or clients. It is the productivity that measures the performance of an organization and it can also be used for companies themselves in order to assess their own progress. Productivity increases the overall efficiency of an organization. When the efficiency of the organization increases, the production capacity of the company is utilized to the optimum level. Thus, all resources are used in an effective and efficient manner to get the best possible results.

Perceived quality

Perceived quality can be defined as the customer’s perception of the overall quality or superiority of a product or service with respect to its intended purpose, relative to alternatives (Olivella, Olivella, Cuatrecasas & Gavilan, 2008). Perceived quality is a first perception by customers. It thus differs from several related concept, such as:

- Actual or objective quality: The extent to which the product or service delivers superior service
- Product-based quality: The nature and quantity of ingredients, features or services included
- Manufacturing quality: Conformance to specification, the "zero defects" goal

On the other hand, Czabke (2007) explains that, Perceived quality is an intangible, overall feeling about a brand. However, it usually will be based on underlying dimensions which include characteristics of the products to which the brand is attached such as reliability and performance. To understand perceived quality, the identification and measurement of the underlying dimensions will be useful but the perceived quality itself is a summary, global construct. In manufacturing world, quality is the expectations of customers to grow day by day, it is very important for a business to continually improve the quality of the products and services it has to offer (Heras, Casadesus & Ochoa, 2011). High standards do not just happen by chance. It evolves over some time as a result of experience. Organizations can improve and secure their future by engaging in a process of continual improvement and adopting new processes of conformity assessment.

Workplace Conflict Management Strategies and Organisational Performance

Emmanuel, Babatunde, Nanle and Olalekan (2015) investigated the effect of conflict management on the performance of financial service organisation in Nigeria. Their study employs descriptive research design and uses questionnaire to collect data from 8 (eight) employees of the bank. The study reveals that a significant positive relationship existed between conflict management and organisational performance. Okike, Akalabi, Magaji and Sonubi (2015) examined the effect of conflict management on organisational performance of banks in Nigeria. The explores a descriptive survey design through the use of questionnaire. And was tested using regression model. The study found a significant relationship between conflict management and organisational performance. On the attempt to analyse the impact of workplace conflict and organisational performance in Nigerian manufacturing firms, Olukayode (2015) used a descriptive and inferential statistics to analyse the questionnaires designed. Exploring spearman ranked correlation analysis, the results of the empirical test showed a significant positive relationship between conflict management strategies and organisational performance.

Hotepo (2010) investigate the effect of organizational conflict on organizational performance. The study employs descriptive research design and uses questionnaire to collect data from 96 managers in some selected Airlines, Road Transport and Insurance companies in Lagos Metropolis. The research revealed that limited resources is the major cause of conflict and that conflicts have both negative and positive effects on organization, but when managed properly, the positive effects can be used to encourage organizational innovativeness and build cooperation among the employees. Uchendu, Anijaobi-Idem and Odigwe (2013) examined the relationship that exists between principals' conflict management and organizational performance in Cross River State, Nigeria. The authors employed questionnaire to gather their data. The instrument was a 4 point Likert type scale consisting 32 items. Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient Analysis was used in analyzing the data. The result of the analysis revealed that, there is a significant relationship between principals' conflict management in terms of teacher-teacher conflict (TTC), teacher-student conflict (TSC), principal-teacher conflict

(PTC) and organizational performance. Kazimoto (2013) analyzed the elements of a conflict management process and leadership organizational change and the benefits of managing conflict. The author concludes that leadership approaches are the key important factors for conflict management. The study recommends that managers in various organizations should encourage open communication policy, so that all employees get the right information at the right time.

Min-Chih, Ching-Ting, Huo-Tsan Chang and Yu-Yuan Ko (2010) examined the relationship conflict has a greater impact on learning performance than does process conflict. The effects of dysfunctional conflict on learning performance in a Chinese cultural context were explored with cognitive style as a moderator. The results of their analysis show that the relationship between process conflict and learning performance is quadratic. In addition, it was discovered that relationship conflict has a greater effect on learning performance than does process conflict. Mukolwe, Korir, Eliza, Milka, and Musyoki (2014) investigated the effect of interpersonal conflict on organizational performance of selected hotels in Kisii town. The study employed both descriptive survey and explanatory research designs and targeted a population of 368 employees of purposively selected hotels. The data was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics while multiple regression was used to test the hypotheses. The results indicated that interpersonal conflict strategies, relationship conflict and task conflict significantly affect organizational performance respectively, while outcomes of interpersonal conflict do not significantly affect organizational performance.

CONCLUSION

The study investigated the impact of conflict management on organizational performance in a reforming and developing economy. Review of literature provided strong evidence of integrative conflict management strategies and their relationship with organizational performance. The present study empirically reinforced the results of previous studies with regard to the link between workplace conflict management and business performance. The study also highlighted the importance of integrative conflict management as a technique of changing from the destructive status of conflict situation to constructive handling of conflicts in the enhancement of organizational performance in the workplace.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Although conflicts have both negative and positive effects, the management and the employees should work towards achieving the positive effects rather than the negative. In the light of the paper findings and conclusions above, the researcher hereby recommends the following suggestions:

- i. That management should encourage a free flow of communication between the management and the employee.
- ii. Management should encourage and promote interpersonal relationships among co-workers to improve on their morale
- iii. There is need for constant dialogue between management and the employees to clarify issues and exchange ideas.
- iv. Management should re-orient employees on the effect of conflict on organizational performance.

- v. Group interaction and activities should be followed up so as to ensure a degree of functionality compatible to conflicts. Positive conflicts will only be possible if particularities of the organization are analyzed.
- vi. Efforts should be made by the management to organize seminars/workshops on organizational conflict management from time to time for the employees. This will enable employees learn about conflict and how it can be effectively managed for individual and organization effectiveness.
- vii. Finally, good leadership on the part of management and employee representatives can be a strategy for preventing conflicts.

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