International Journal of Scientific Research in Education (IJSRE)

Conflict Management and Resolution Strategies for Enhanced Personnel Productivity and Sustainable Administration in Higher Institutions in Nigeria

Akpoyovwaire Samuel Mukoro[i]
Department of Educational Foundations and Administration,
College of education, Warri, Delta state, Nigeria.
mukorosam@yahoo.com

…….............................

Abstract

Conflict Management and resolution are the process by which approaches and techniques are introduced in an organization to control conflicts. Conflict can therefore be seen as a fact of life. It is inevitable and reality in every higher educational institutions. Conflict occurs whenever incompatible activities occur. This paper, therefore, look at the concepts of conflict, management and sustainable administration. The paper also examines the process of conflict and the causes of conflict. Finally, the paper goes on to discuss the conflict management and resolution strategies that enhances personnel productivity and sustainable administration in higher education in Nigeria.

Keywords: Conflict Management, Resolution, Productivity, Sustainable, Administration, Higher Institutions

Reference to this paper should be made as follows:

…….............................

INTRODUCTION

The difference of opinions, aims and interest of the individuals and groups in the institutions of higher learning may breed conflict among the staff, between staff and management, as well as students and school authority. The uneasy aftermath of this difference may be monumental disorderliness, confusion and dysfunctional situation or environment (Nweke, 2001). That notwithstanding, for the institutions of higher learning in Nigeria to carry out their functions very well, management, staff and students must be interdependent. The various departments in the institutions must build a good inter-human relationship in the organization. Amason (1996) averred that people in organizations have both personal and role preferences about the organizations' actions and policies. However, conflict arise or result whenever it is impossible for staff to carry out their desired action, hence, management and staff in institutions of higher learning sometimes engage themselves in conflict situation which in the extreme cases, result in strikes thereby reducing and interrupting productivity of the staff (Imhabekhai, 2001).

Evidence abounds of the existence of high rate of conflicts in the institutions of higher learning in Nigeria. Awosusi (2005) reported that the level of occurrence of staff authority conflicts in Nigerian tertiary institutions was high while Amuseghan (2007), found that the level of occurrence of student-authority conflicts in the United Kingdom (UK) and Canadian universities was also high. Also, this can be seen according to Olagunju (1999) in the number of probes and investigations into the various operations of the tertiary institutions. For instance, Olagunju reported that in December 1993 the Polytechnic of Ibadan which experienced a lot of crises then received a visitation panel to look into its operations. Also, there was a visitation panel inaugurated on March 26, 2009 to investigate the cause of the crisis that engulfed the University of Benin – Benin City (Deji–Folutile, 2010). According to him, the university was deeply embroiled in crisis in 2009. In most institutions of higher learning in Nigeria, there are groups of aggrieved persons that often constitute themselves into a Committee of Concerned Academics (Esedebe, 2003). In much the same way, most Nigeria universities for the past twenty years do not have reliable academic calendar because, peace in such institutions which is required for sustainable academic programme eluded them (Nwabueze, 1995; Ogunbamweru, cited in Enyi, 2001). In the Nigerian university system, there had been chains of conflicts which had led to gradual but steady disruption of academic activities (Adeyemi & Ademilua, 2012).

The Nigeria institutions of higher learning are established to:

a. contribute to national development through high level relevant manpower training;
b. develop and inculcate proper values for the survival of the individual and society;
c. develop the intellectual capability of individual to understand and appreciate their local and external environments;
d. acquire both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individual to be self-reliant and useful members of society;
e. promote and encourage scholarship and community service;
f. forge and cement national unity; and
g. promote national and international understanding and interaction (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004).

The actualization of these goals and objectives is possible in an atmosphere free of rancour, crises, confusion and conflict. It follows, therefore, that the prompt recognition of the development and sources of conflict and the application of appropriate strategies and resolution techniques will definitely help in reducing them. Thus, this paper, seeks to highlight and analyze issues in conflict as it concerns workers and management in the institutions of higher learning with a view to identifying for recommendations, measures to ameliorate the situation, thus enhancing staff productivity and sustainable administration.

What is Conflict?

Conflict means disagreement, strife, discord and hostility occurring in any human organization. According to Reitz as cited in Onoyase (1998), conflict is a breakdown or disruption in normal activities in such a way that individuals or groups concerned experience difficulty in working together. It is any kind of opposition or antagonistic interaction between two or more parties. Owens-Ibe (2000) presented conflict as the result of poor and ineffective communication, a breakdown in normal communication, socio-cultural factors, environmental factors, personality (demographic or psychological factors, among several others). In this regard, it can be clearly stated that conflict is inherent in any organization as it consists of human beings. Conflict brings disagreement and crises in the process of relating with one group or the other. However, a well controlled conflict may be creative or productive. Dunhan as cited in Olagunju (1999) argued that conflict can provide needed change in organization, increase group cohesion and cooperation and generate creative new ideas. Thus, conflict may lead to productive or destructive outcome depending on how it is managed. As noted by Imhabekhai (2000), conflict has negative and

positive consequences. Efforts should, therefore, be made to eliminate the negative consequences while the positive consequences should be strengthened.

Concept of Management

Management is the process of mobilizing the available scarce human and material resources in an organization to realize stated goals and planned mission. Kinard (1998) defined management as the process directed towards maximizing the potentials of people and coordinating their efforts to attain some pre-determined goals. To Adesina (1990), management is the organization and mobilization of human and material resources in a particular system for the achievement of identified objectives in the system. In effect, management is the means of harnessing, mobilizing and organizing organizational resources to achieve the stated objectives of the organization. Thus, management is inevitable in the effort to resolve or control organization conflict.

Conceptualizing Sustainable Administration

Administration can be referred to as the procurement and arrangement of human, financial and material resources and programmes for the realization of aims and objectives. Thus, sustainable administration is concerned with the activity through which employees are motivated and trained to effectively organize and arrange financial and material resources by the effort of the leadership of an institution in order to achieve its objectives. In effect, the essence of administration is to effectively enhance organizational goals. The model below depicts sustainable administration in an organization.

Figure I: Model of Sustainable Administration in an Organization

This model indicates that management and leadership styles contribute essentially to stimulate the individual responsibility on the part of employees/staff to effectively and efficiently realize the organizational goals.

THE PROCESS OF CONFLICT

It is a truism that conflict takes time to develop. As such, various factors breed conflict in an organization. Most of these factors take time to be observed in most cases by the groups involved in the conflict. It follows, therefore, that at the beginning of conflict the parties to it may not notice it. This shows that there is a process that may be followed in manifestation of conflict. The process of conflict

development is significantly imperative as it will aid administrator to understand the changing nature of conflict and how it can be effectively managed. Rue and Byars as cited in Olagunju (1999) theorized that conflict is a dynamic process that involves some stages such as latent, perceived, felt, manifest and aftermath.

1. Latent Stage: This is the state in which the basic conditions of conflict exist but have not been noticed by either of the parties.
2. Perceived Stage: The basic conditions for conflict are now noticed by one or all the parties.
3. Felt Stage: The perception of the conflict by one or both parties now lead to a change of behavior, internal tension starts to build in one or both parties.
4. Manifest Stage: The building of tension occasioned by change in behavior is now noticed to any party who care to notice. This stage is usually marked by such common negative behavioral changes as lying, stealing, strike, and sabotage among others.

CAUSES OF CONFLICT

There are usually various factors that normally lead to conflict. These are some of them:

1. **Communication Barrier:** Poor communication, communication overload, total absence of information or feedback mechanism, poor perception pernicious, ambiguity in communication and ignorance can degenerate into either conflict or crises. Thus, the basic problem of interpersonal communication could played up and lead to conflict. Communication conflict usually arises from misunderstanding in the communication process – transmission of messages and meaning from one person to another. This is usually due to lack of well-defined communication network in a school organization. Inadequate systems of communication on educational institution policies, changes in working practices and the introduction of new policies affecting the lives of staff lead to disputes, feelings of insecurity, confusion and resentment among staff. Adeyemi and Ademilua (2012) identified communication gap between management and workers as the leading cause of conflict in the universities. Also, Adegun (2002) identified communication lapses as a problem to administrative effectiveness in Nigerian institutions of learning. This suggests that communication gap between management and staff might cause conflict and adversely affect administrative effectiveness in the universities.

2. **Situational Factors/Issues:** A good number of situational factors may create conflict in the tertiary institutions such as broken and inadequate facilities on campus. As noted by Udeajah (2001), it has become difficult for the university management, even government to provide certain support services and facilities needed for conducive learning, teaching and research on the institution. This often sparks off conflict and other related actions. Other situational factors/issues that can lead to conflict in tertiary institutions are poorly planned and executed retirement exercise, relocation of office and internal transfer of staff (as in the case of non-academic staff), as well as, control from opposition outside the institution.

3. **Management Style:** Management style can also lead to conflict in the tertiary institutions. There are two theories of style of management such as X and Y. According to theory X, man has inherent dislike for work and will avoid it if he can. The theory explained further that he (man) must be coerced, controlled, directed, or threatened with punishment to get him to put forth adequate effort. Managers who adopt this style are usually dictatorial and allow limited initiative and independence. Such style may lead workers to gang-up against the managers, showing signs of uncorporation. Such uncorporation from workers may eventually lead to conflict.

4. **Value Conflict:** Divergent in value and interest among the various individuals and groups within the tertiary institutions can lead to conflict.

Finally, Iwuji (1987) identified non-payment of salaries and fringe benefits and refusal to grant motor-vehicle loans as sources of conflict.

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT AND RESOLUTION STRATEGIES

Conflict occurs in various ways and at all level of the tertiary institutions. Conflict occurrence can be with the immediate system or external that is spread to other section outside the system. Thus, there is need to control and resolve conflict in any human organization. This is because conflict if well managed would bring positive developments in the tertiary institutions. Although different organizations have procedure and statutory ways of controlling conflicts, in this paper, emphasis is on the management and resolution strategies that would improve workers job performance and sustainable administration in tertiary institutions.

A tertiary institution can ensure industrial peace and harmony that will invariably swell up staff job performance and sustainable administration by the adoption of industrial democracy. Industrial democracy, according to Yesufu (1984), is that policy which is unequivocally subscribed to, not only by government, but by employers and organized labour alike. It implies that there should be established institution or machinery – particularly of joint consultation and collective bargaining through which management and employees meet on an equal footing to discuss, consult, and if need be, negotiate the terms and conditions of service. Thus, industrial democracy can serve as instrument of maximizing or enhancing workers job performance, as its successful usage can also prevent to large extent, industrial conflict in tertiary institutions. This, as argued by Imhabekhai (2000) develop greater sense of belonging and behavior as members of the same family unit working together for the mutual benefit of the enterprise. This increases the level of employee productivity and sustainable administration.

Also, in order to ensure that conflict is reduced in tertiary institutions, there is the need to satisfy the human needs, for instance, the satisfaction of human need as propose by Abraham Maslow in hierarchy of human needs in sequential order for effective management of human conflict in an organization (Ezegbe, 1997). In this sense, Ejiogu as cited in Okonkwo (1997) averred that until people's needs are satisfied, they cannot perform efficiently on their job. Thus, management ability to motivate the workers in tertiary institutions will reduce tension and invariably industrial conflict that culminates from non-satisfaction and lack of motivation. Thus, the motivation should be in forms of adequate remuneration, recognition, reward for excellent task performance, promotion, good prospects of self development and on-the-job advancement, involvement and participation in decision making process in the school system, safe work environment, love, care and sharing one another's problem (Imhabekhai, 2000).

In addition, there should be free flow of information as communication is a significant predictor in establishing understanding among people. Here, management has the role of ensuring that not only should they transmit information but make sure that the messages sent out is well understood by receivers. For management to be clearly understood, they should adopt open door policy in their affairs. Accordingly, management should always inform its staff about the state of affairs in the system rather than covering up issues that are of interest to the staff. As such, management has to stimulate regular upward flow of communication as well as downward and horizontal communication for easy incorporation of the views, opinions and ideas of the staff in decision-making. Effective communication between the management and workers is very important as management cannot work in isolation without the contribution of other staff in the system. However, lack of access to information breeds rumour and invariably conflicts in institutions. In this sense, tertiary institution administrators should be well groomed on communication skills since it will make staff to understand their message, and in turn reduce conflict and maximize productivity to enhance sustainable administration. As noted by Deji-Folutile (2010), university should institute an active communication channel to keep the university community abreast of its activities and to feel the pulse of the community on issues affecting the progress of the university.

Furthermore, education managers should put in place workers' education programmes. The school administrators must increase the tempo of education, re-training and development of employees as education is a great tool of reviving thinking and ideas. More training and development will make

employees to be sound in their imaginative and creative thought. Education in a way helps in finding out new and better ways of doing things and how to apply them in the day to day duties of workers. In an effort of the management to minimize conflict in the school system, it must encourage and plan the education and re-training of employees for them to be creative and innovative. This is because creative and innovative workers will help managers introduce new ideas and sound ways of putting ideas into practice, rather than disrupting of organizational progress. This is probably why Deji-Folutile (2010) remarked that government should embark on a deliberate education of staff in area of ethnicity, nepotism and discipline in order to create an enabling environment for academic work to thrive.

Consequently, to ensure that conflict is largely reduced to facilitate increase productivity of workers and sustainable administration, there should be delegation of authorities. Education administrators in the tertiary institutions should by all means, delegate some authorities to their subordinates. Subordinates should be allowed to manage big tasks in the system. It is an antecedent that would lead to positive influence. By delegation of authorities subordinates will be up and doing and more alert all time in their daily function. Despite the fact that this may create tension in the subordinates, however, the tension will probably lead to positive orientation and fulfillment in the long run when creatively and tactically manipulated by the administrator.

CONCLUSION

This paper gives the tertiary institution managers and staff some measures on how to resolve and reduce conflict to enhance productivity. This was done by defining conflict, management and exposure to the process and causes of conflict. Finally, the tertiary institution managers are provided some strategies that will help them to manage and reduce conflict. It is, therefore, expected that school managers will be in a better position to effectively manage their workers through mutual relations and understanding thereby ensuring greater productivity.

Recommendations

1. The management of tertiary institutions should improve on their communication channels between the management and staff, as well as, among staff, as this may invariably enhance staff productivity and sustainable administration in the institution.
2. Management of tertiary institutions should adopt a blend of industrial democracy and participative decision-making in order to reduce tension that may have resulted to conflict.
3. Management of tertiary institutions should institutionalize dialogue procedure for conflict management to enhance employee productivity and sustainable administration.

REFERENCES

Adegun, O. A. (2002). Communication as a correlate of administrative effectiveness in secondary schools in South-West Nigeria. Ph.D. thesis submitted to the Faculty of Education, University of Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria.

Adesina, S. (1990). *Educational Management*. Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers.

Adeyemi, T. O., & Ademilua, S. O. (2012). Conflict management strategies and administration effectiveness in Nigerian universities. *Journal of Emerging Trends in Educational Research and Policy Studies*, *3*(3), 368–375.

Amason, A. C. (1996). Distinguishing the effects of functional and dysfunctional conflict on strategic decision-making: Resolving a paradox for top management teams. *Academy of Management Journal*, *39*(1), 123–148.

Amusegham, S. A. (2007). *Peace and Conflict Studies: An Introductory Text*. Akure: Stebak Books and Publishers.

Awosusi, O. O. (2005). Relationship between work alienation and industrial conflicts – A study of academic staff of universities in South-West Nigeria. Ph.D. thesis, University of Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria.

Deji-Folutile, O. (2010). UNIBEN: Panel re-affirms varsity's federal Status. *The Punch*, Tuesday, June 15, 2010, P. 37.

Enyi, D. (2001). Students' perception of sources and management strategies for resolving student related conflicts in universities: A study of University of Nigeria, Nsukka. In A. U. Akubue & D. Enyi (Eds.) *Crises and Challenging in Higher Education in Developing Countries*. Ibadan: Wisdom Publishers.

Esedebe, P. O. (2003). Reflections on history, nation-building and the university of Nigeria. An inaugural lecture of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka delivered on Thursday, 11 September, 2003.

Ezegbe, C. (1997). Management of conflict in Nigeria educational system. In A. N. Ndu, L. O. Ocho, & B. S. Okeke (Eds.) *Dynamics of Educational Administration and Management: The Nigerian Perspective*. Awka: Meks Publishers Ltd.

Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004). *National Policy on Education*. Lagos: NERDC Press.

Imhabekhai, C.I. (2000). "Management of industrial conflicts in educational institutions for enhanced personnel productivity". *International Journal of Educational Planning and Administration*, *1*(1), 82–92.

Iwuji, E. C. (1987). "Settlement of trade dispute". In D. Otobo & M. Omole (Eds.) *Readings in Industrial Relations in Nigeria*. Lagos: Malt House Press.

Kinard, J. (1988). *Management*. Lexington, D.C: Health and Company.

Nweke, O.F.F. (2001). *Public Relations Practice Concept and Strategies*. Enugu: Hamson Publishers.

Okonkwo, S.N. (1997). "Job satisfaction and work behaviour of Nigerian teachers". In A. N. Ndu, L. O. Ocho, & B. S. Okeke (eds) *Dynamics of Educational Administration and Management: The Nigerian Perspective*. Awka: Meks Publishers.

Olagunju, Y. A. (1999). Role of managers in managing conflict. *The Nigerian Accountant*, *32*(4), 61–67.

Onoyase, D. (1998). Conflict management in our educational institutions. In P. O. Itedjere (Ed.) *Current Issues in Nigerian Educational System*. Benin City: Osasue Publishers.

Owens-Ibe, N. (2000). Conflict in organization. In E. S. Soola (Ed.), *Organizational Communication: A Book of Readings*. Ibadan: Delby Concepts.

Udeajah, R.A. (2001). Crises in Nigeria's tertiary institutions. In A. U. Akubue & D. Enyi, (Eds.) *Crises and Challenging in Higher Education in Developing Countries*. Ibadan: Wisdom Publishers.

Yesufu, T. M. (1984). T*he Dynamics of Industrial Relations: The Nigerian Experiences*. Ibadan: University Press.

© IJSRE

----

[i] Samuel Akpoyovwaire Mukoro lectures in the Department of Educational Foundations and Administration, College of Education, Warri, Delta State, Nigeria. His master's degree dissertation evaluated the communication strategies in the administration of colleges of education. His research interest include: access to and equity in education, instructional supervision and quality improvement, higher education administration, gender issues in education, educational planning, philosophy of education, ICT in education and related domains.