

Causes and Effects of Conflict on Workers' Productivity in Enugu State College of Education (Technical) Enugu, Nigeria

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Abstract

There has been strife and conflicts in Enugu State College of Education (Technical) Enugu for sometime now. This study investigated the causes of these conflicts and its attendant effects on the workers productivity. A survey research method was employed in the investigation where by 100 sampled respondents returned the researcher's generated questionnaire. It was found out that lack of upward movement of workers in terms of promotion, their employers inability to implement an agreed policy and management's intimidation of staff were among the causes of conflict in ESCET. It was recommended that for the path of peace to be cleared, promotions of due staff must commence immediately and that government should implement its agreed bargaining with the staff union and finally all forms of intimidations must cease in the institution. These will bring back industrial harmony and promote productivity in the institution.

Keywords: *Conflict, Productivity, Collective Bargaining, Public Institutions.*

Introduction

In the course of human interactions, conflict is bound to occur. According to Rahim (2001) conflict is inevitable among humans. When two or more social entities (i.e., individuals, groups, organizations, and nations) come in contact with one another in attaining their objectives, their relationship may become incompatible or inconsistent. Relationships among such entities may become inconsistent when two or more of them desire a similar resource that is in short supply; when they have partially exclusive behavioural preferences regarding their joint action; or when they have different attitudes, value, beliefs, and skills. Thompson (1998, p.4) assumes that "conflict is the perception of differences of interests among people".

Conflict could be seen as a situation of competition in which the parties are aware of the incomparability of potential future position in which each is incompatible with the wishes of the other (Ojo & Abolade, 2014, p.64). Conflict could arise because of the employee quest to maximize profit while workers representatives are out to ensure continuous improved condition of living for their members. Conflict could also arise as a result of failure to honour agreed items on collective bargaining (Ojo & Abolade, 2014).

When workers rights and prerogatives are trampled upon according to Damachi (1999), it could evoke conflict. Some of these tramplings include pay, conditions of service, fringe benefits, etc. Azamosa (2004) summarizes conflict as involving total range of behaviours and attitudes that are in contrast between owners/managers on the one hand and working class people on the other. It is a state of disagreement over issues of substance or emotional antagonism and may arise due to anger, mistrust or personality clashes (Asamosa, 2014).

Conflict in that perspective “evokes feelings of chaos, stress, anarchy and war” (Ohajanwa, 2013, p. 18). Conflict, Ohajanwa (2013) continues is perceived as negative and produces destructive outcome and a plaque to be avoided. This assertion is not however supported by all. According to Conflict Resolution Stakeholders Network (CRESNET) (2001), conflict can evoke an opportunity or chance for change. Conflict in organizations creates an opportunity for conflict resolution which brings peace at work place. Peace according to Obisi (1996) forms one of the fundamental factors for enhanced productivity with resultant benefits to both labour and management as well as for economic development of the country. It will not be out of place therefore, to consider conflict as an inevitable and desirable factor in the work place (Ojo & Abolade, 2014).

What is important is not whether conflict will occur because it must occur in any relationship but how it is managed or resolved to enhance industrial peace and harmony and the promotion of productivity in the work place. This paper therefore seeks to review the causes and effect of conflict on workers productivity using Enugu State College of Education (Technical) Enugu as a point of analysis.

Problem Statement

Conflict especially organizational conflict is inevitable. Pondy (1967) in Rahim (2001, p.7) observed that “organization theories that do not admit conflict provide poor

guidance in dealing with problems of organizational efficiency, stability, governance, and change, for conflict within and between organizations is intimately related as either symptom, cause, or effect, to each of these problems". Baron (1990) posits that any management that wants to understand organizational behaviour must first study organizational conflict.

Conflict in organizations can be as a result of internal or external reasons. Internally, according to Shepell (2011) conflicts may arise because most employees depend on inputs, resources or support from other team members to perform their duties. If an employee perceives that others are not doing their own part of the job, conflict may result. Relatedly, Shepell (2011) continued that employees' different approaches to work may bring about conflict and that worker's diversity in terms of gender, age, cultural backgrounds, personality types and life experiences may bring about tensions at work place. When team roles are not clearly defined, conflict over who is responsible for what becomes inevitable. When new policies meant to bring about change are introduced in organizations and, employees disagree with these new policies, the road to conflict has been cleared (Shepell, 2011, emphasis mine).

The external reasons drawing from the analysis of Castetter (1992) consist of the outside political environment influencing the total organization. This is remarkable in most public institutions because of political interference by the government on the administration of these entities. All these problems I suspect in no small measure, affect the productivity of workers especially in Enugu State College of Education (Technical) Enugu. As a way to ameliorate these problems, this paper seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What are the causes of conflicts in organizations like Enugu State College of Education (Technical) Enugu?
2. To what extent has conflict in Enugu State College of Education (Technical) Enugu affected the productivity of its workers?

Literature Review

Defining Conflict

Conflict in organizations is a sine qua non. As human beings in their everyday life encounter studs, so do organizations face studs in the mode of conflicts. The studs that human beings encounter if managed properly propels them to a higher steady state also are conflicts in organizations. If properly handled brings about industrial peace and harmony that will only result in increased productivity.

Schramm-Nielsen (2002) defines conflict as a state of serious disagreement and argument about something perceived to be valuable by at least one of the parties involved. Ojo and Abolade (2014) postulate that conflict arises when individuals and work groups compete for limited resources, power, status, etc. to the extent that their competition leads to disruption (or even enhancement) of cooperative endeavours.

Fajana (1995) conceptualized conflict as a disagreement between two or more parties who perceive that they have incompatible concerns. It exists whenever an action by one party is perceived as preventing or interfering with the goals, needs or actions of another party. In that regards, Mullins (2005) describes conflict as behaviour intended to obstruct the achievement of some other person's goals. Accordingly, Ojo and Abolade (2014) opine that conflict is based on the incompatibility of goals and arises from opposing behaviours. It can be viewed at the individual, group or organizational level.

In the views of Roloff (1987, p.496) "organizational conflict occurs when members engage in activities that are incompatible with those of colleagues within their network, members of other collectivities, or unaffiliated individuals who utilize the services or products of the organization". These literatures are all consistent on the fact that conflict arises in organizations due to disagreements and atavistic behaviours.

Baron (1990, p.199) concludes that conflict is characterized with the following elements:

1. Conflict includes opposing interests between individuals or groups in a zero-sum situation.
2. Such opposed interests must be recognized for conflict to exist.
3. Conflict involves beliefs, by each side, that the other will thwart (or has already thwarted) its interests.

4. Conflict is a process; it develops out of existing relationships between individuals or groups and reflects their past interactions and the contexts in which these took place and
5. Actions by one or both sides do, in fact, produce thwarting of others' goals.

Causes of Conflict in Organizations

There are varied reasons why conflict occurs in organizations. Grace (2012) highlights the causes of conflict as including but not limited to differing values where some individuals possess strong beliefs which they are not willing to compromise and which co-workers do not share. Opposing interests where an employee decides to pursue her own career goals, without regard for the organizational goals which results in strife with her co-workers; personality conflicts where two workers have opposing personalities. They are bound to clash especially where there is no mutual respect; poor communication where information flow is poor or error prone; and lack of teamwork where there is lack of cooperation by colleagues leading to draw back in the achievement of objectives (Grace, 2012).

Fajana (1995) believes that conflicts can arise over a multiple of organizational experiences, such as incompatible goals, differences of values and philosophies or disputes over shared resources. Other determinants of conflicts in organizations are the employer's quest to maximize profit while the workers representatives are out to ensure continuous improved condition of living for their members and failure to honour agreed items on collective bargaining by the employer (Ojo & Abolade, 2014, p. 65). Those items according to Damachi (1999) include pay, condition of services, etc and he emphasized that they are workers rights and employers prerogatives and if trampled upon, could cause conflict.

Armstrong (1990) sees conflict from another perspective. He sees change as a cause of conflict. Change according to him is always with us but it is not always welcome. Resistance to change is natural because of our conformity to customary norms and expected ways of behaviour and individual differences. These could lead to conflict if not well managed.

In the final analysis, conflicts in organizations do occur as a result of internal factors which include among others personality conflicts, communication gaps, etc or

external factors as dishonouring of agreements by the employer and introduction of an organizational change among others.

Effects of Conflict on Productivity of Employees

Productivity of workers can be positively or negatively influenced by conflict. Some writers agree that a realistic view of conflict is that it has productive as well as destructive potentials (Assael, 1969; Deutsch, 1969; Jehn, 1997; de Dreu & van de Vliert, 1997; Kelly & Kelly, 1998; Pelled, Eisenhardt, & Xin, 1999). The productive and destructive potentials are termed the functional and dysfunctional outcomes of conflict in organizations and are as follows:

Functional Outcomes: Conflict may stimulate innovation, creativity, and growth; organizational decision making may be improved; alternative solutions to a problem may be found; conflict may lead to synergistic solutions to common problems; individual and group performance may be enhanced; individuals and groups may be forced to search for new approaches; individuals and groups may be required to articulate and clarify their positions.

Dysfunctional Outcomes: Conflict may cause job stress, burnout, and dissatisfaction; communication between individuals and groups may be reduced; a climate of distrust and suspicion can be developed; relationships may be damaged; job performance may be reduced; resistance to change can be increased; organizational commitment and loyalty may be affected.

The analysis of the above discussion is that conflict affects performance positively and negatively. If performance in organizations is to be enhanced, negative effects or dysfunctional outcomes are to be reduced and positive effects or functional outcomes promoted.

Theoretical Framework

Human needs theory assumes that all humans have basic human needs which they seek to fulfill, and that the denial of these needs leads to frustration and conflict. Rasati et al (1990) propounded that basic human needs comprise physical, psychological, social and spiritual needs. To provide access to one and deny or hinder access to another will amount to denial and could make people to resort to violence in an effort to protect these needs.

The theory also assumes that many deep rooted conflicts are as a result of reactions from people or individuals whose basic needs of life have been frustrated or unmet. In an organizational setting therefore, denial or inability to meet the needs of employees by the management almost always leads to frustration and conflict which negatively affects performance and productivity. If on the other hand, the needs of workers are met and there are presence of other variables like the individual's abilities and competencies, the productivity at work will be high.

Research Methodology

In this study, survey research design was employed. Data for the study were collected from the selected employees of Enugu State College of Education (Technical) Enugu in order to determine the causes and effects of conflict on organizational productivity. In that regard, the population of this study is the staff of the above mentioned public institution. Simple random sampling technique was used in the selection of our sample size. This method was adopted because it gives all employees equal chance of being selected as a sample or respondent. The sample size was 110 employees out of which after the distribution of our research instrument (questionnaire), 100 respondents returned the instrument. This translates to 91% response rate.

To ensure the validity of the research instrument, a pilot or trial study was carried out. 20 respondents were selected and given the actual questionnaire meant for the study. Upon collection, the researcher compared the questionnaires with the one filled and scored by the researcher himself. There was a high degree of consistency which means the instrument was valid. In this study also, the test-retest reliability process was used. This was to check the degree of consistency of our instrument. This was done by distributing questionnaires on two different occasions to determine the level of consistency. The people given the questionnaire are those that share the same characteristics with the sample group of the main study. The result collected showed that all of them neared consistency and therefore were reliable. Data collected were analyzed using tables, frequencies and simple percentages to establish the causes and effects of conflict on productivity of employees of ESCET.

Analysis, Findings and Discussion of Findings

This section presents the results of the study which emanated from the analysis of the data collected through the use of questionnaire and the interpretations of such data to obtain answers to our two research questions. The data were analyzed using tables, frequencies and simple percentages for easy and straight jacket analysis and understanding.

RQ1

What are the causes of conflicts in Enugu State College of Education (Technical) Enugu?

Table 1: Causes of conflict in ESCET

Options	Frequency	Percentage %
Lack of promotion	53	53
Inability of Enugu State Government to honour agreements reached with staff unions.	27	27
Poor staff welfare	8	8
Unhealthy staff rivalry/disagreements.	5	5
Management intimidation of employees.	7	7
Total	100	100

Source: Research Data, 2015

The causes of conflicts and tensions in ESCET, Enugu have been enumerated in the table above and, analyzing the data there in, 53% of our sample respondents were adamant that lack of promotion in the institution is the greatest source of conflict. Promotion that should statutorily come every three years take more than six years to happen sometimes more. In that regards, motivation of staff is crushed, restlessness and uneasy calm are always evident in the institution and productivity is seriously hampered. The second option i.e the inability of Enugu State government to honour agreements reached with labour unions is another source of conflict in ESCET. 27% of our respondents dwelt on this factor as a source of conflict in the institution. Example could be given with an agreement the labour unions of the institution reached with its employer (Enugu State Government) on the use of an enhanced salary scale known as CONTEDISS as against the present CONTISS being used. Six years after the collective bargaining, government

has not implemented any aspect of it. This in no small measure is a source of conflict that is affecting productivity in that institution.

The three other options on the causes of conflict in ESCET, Enugu fall under internal reasons of conflict in organizations (see Shepell, 2011) and they include poor staff welfare, unhealthy staff rivalry and disagreements and management intimidation of employees. The percentage of 8%, 5% and 7% recorded by our respondents on these options clearly shows that they are not veritable reasons of conflict in our studied organization but rather a talking point.

In the final analysis there are two main causes of conflict in ESCET Enugu which includes lack of promotion of staff as and when due and the inability of their employer (Enugu State Government) in honouring agreements reached with the labour unions of the institution.

RQ2

To what extent has conflict in Enugu State College of Education (Technical) Enugu affected the productivity of its workers?

Table 2: Extent to which conflict in ESCET affected productivity of its employees

Options	Frequency	Percentage %
Very High Extent	71	71
High Extent	16	16
No Idea	2	2
Low Extent	8	8
Very Low Extent	3	3
Total	100	100

Source: Research Data, 2015

The results of the table above show that conflicts in ESCET like in other organizations highly affect the productivity of its workers. 71% of our respondents overwhelmingly

agreed that their productivity have been greatly influenced negatively by the unending conflicts in the institution. The result is the presence of dysfunctional outcomes like job stress, dissatisfaction, reduction of communication between the unions and the government, a climate of distrust and suspicion, damaged relationship and a general poor performance at work.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this research, the research proposes the following recommendations:

1. The management of Enugu State College of Education (Technical) Enugu, and indeed the management of other public institutions should, based on the rules of civil service and following the terms and conditions of employment of public institutions promote all staff as and when due. This will go a long way in reducing tension and conflict and enhancing motivation and zeal of employees.
2. Government of Enugu State is advised to honour agreements reached with Labour Unions and deal with unions with utmost honesty. This will bring back the trust of workers on government and promote peace and productivity at work place.
3. It is generally agreed that a good staff welfare scheme enhances productivity at work place. The management of ESCET should continue to focus on this aspect while eliminating staff intimidation.

Conclusion

The outcome of conflicts in organizations is low productivity on the part of workers which affects the realization of the organization's goals and objectives. There are many varied reasons of conflicts in organizations but this study dwelt on the causes and

effects of conflict in a public concern like Enugu State College of Education (Technical) Enugu. It is noted that conflict must always be evident in organizations though conflicts are not always undesirable. It serves as a catalyst that prompts a reaction to an action. The resultant outcome of this reaction is stalemate and low productivity.

Peace however is the key to improved productivity and organizational stability. It is on that premise that the management of the institution and its major stakeholder (the Government of Enugu State) have been urged to adhere to the recommendations of this paper and by so doing clear the path for peace and stability that will enhance productivity.

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