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Conflict Management as a Factor in the Promotion of Health and Peaceful Coexistence in the Workplace

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Abstract
Workplace conflict is unavoidable when employees of various backgrounds and different work styles are brought together for a shared goal-oriented business. Conflict management among employers and employees at the workplace is one of the most essential techniques for solving conflict and enhance work performance, peaceful coexistence and health promotion within organizations. Conflict management is one of the essential though may be neglected within organizations. This paper focuses on conflict management as a factor for improving work performance, productivity, health promotion and peaceful coexistence in the workplace. Conflicts in the workplace occur when interests and activities of employees, employers or groups within an organization confront each other and prevent attainment of one' party objectives. Which if it is not well managed it may hinder the attainment of organizational goals and also may lead to anxiety, stress, tension and isolations among the employee and employers. The paper illustrated different types of conflict in the workplace and also discussed extensively on how these conflict can be managed to improve performances, productivity, promote health, and ensure peaceful coexistence in the workplace. The authors recommended amongst others that heads of department or administrators, employers and employees must take the offensive and seek to manage conflict in line with the strategies suggested in this paper to ensure peaceful coexistence and health promotion in the workplace.
Keywords: Conflict Management, Factor, Health Promotion, Peaceful Coexistence, Work Place

Introduction

Globally, when people work as a group in a place, conflict is one of the most inevitable outcomes. These conflicts have a profound impact on employment and income-generating opportunities and decent work in an organisation. It brings about the breakdown of the rule of law, destroys livelihoods, displaces populations, disrupts education, decreased productivity, project failure, absenteeism, turnover and termination (Society for Human Resource Management [SHRM], 2017; International Labour Organisation [ILO], 2020). It is worrisome to note that workplace nowadays is operating in a turbulent environment where organizations are searching for measures to improve their work performance, competitiveness, productivity, peaceful coexistence and for a healthy relationship in the workplace (Dodd, 2003; Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, 2020). Lazarus is of the view that despite thousands of years of work by scholars on the role of conflict among co-workers in organizations, the scientific study of conflict within the workplace is a relatively recent phenomenon (Lazarus, 2014). Lazarus maintained that conflict is a common part of organisational life since the purpose of diverse stakeholders, such as managers and staff are often unharmonious (Lazarus, 2014). It is against this social evil ravaging the workplace that this paper seeks to diagnose and to provide a way forward for managing conflict effectively in the workplace.

A workplace can be conceptualized as an organization or a setting in which work is performed. It can be interpreted as a physical location at which people interact in the process of producing goods or services for an organizational purpose (Masters & Albright, 2002). The workplace can also be referred to as the location where an employee provides work for an employer or a place of employment. Such a place can range from a home office to a large office building, manufacturing facilities or factories, stores, farms, out-of-doors, and in any other location where work is performed *(Jackson & Suomi, 2004; Ron, 2015; Heathfield, 2019). Studies have observed that within every human relationship where there is a competition of jobs, resources, power, recognition and security conflict abound (Adomi & Anie, 2005; Adilo, 2019). Studies also observed that when people work as a group in an organization or workplace, conflict cannot be predicted. Hence most managers spend a lot of their working time dealing with conflicts or fallouts from people-related problems (Oachesu, 2016).

In this paper, conflict can be regarded as a disagreement that occurs when the goals, interests or values of different individuals or groups, employees or employers are incompatible and frustrate each other's attempting to achieve objectives in the workplace. Conflict also refers to some form of friction, disagreement, or discord arising between individuals or within a group when the beliefs or actions of one or more members of the group are either resisted by or unacceptable to one or more members of another group (Oachesu, 2016; Abioro, Odunlami, & Ekpudu, 2019; Chandolia & Anastasiou, 2020). Conflict arises through the communication of a variety of issues including differences of opinion, procedural problems, and disagreements over approaches to work-oriented tasks (Friedman, Tidd, Currall, & Tsai, 2000).

Studies have revealed that conflict is very much a part of a workplace or organisational life, and a common occurrence at work according to the studies who reported that about 25 per cent of employees surveyed in 1998 reported having a misunderstanding and as such being treated rudely at work at least once a week, that figure rose to 55 per cent in 2011 and 62 per cent in 2016 [SHRM], 2017). Another survey by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development found that four in 10 UK employees reported having experienced some form of interpersonal conflict at work in the last year (CIPD, 2015). The body also revealed in another study that over a third (35%) of employees surveyed had experienced some form of interpersonal conflict, either an isolated dispute or ongoing difficult relationship in the workplace, over the past year (CIPD, 2020). The body maintained that most of the conflict is between an employee and his or her line manager (CIPD, 2015; 2020). In another study on conflict management and organizational performance with particular reference to selected breweries in the South East, Nigeria. The study revealed that all the conflict management strategies studied such as negotiation, collective bargaining, joint consultation, and alternative dispute resolution were found to have a significant positive relationship with organizational performance (Adilo 2019). Also, a study who examined conflict management strategies; a tool for industrial harmony revealed that the human nature and conflict are synonymous and noted that causes of conflicts can be constructive or destructive to a business (Abioro, Odunlami, & Ekpudu, 2019). However not all conflict is necessarily negative, but even a minor disagreement between people can fester and escalate if it's not addressed and resolved at the earliest opportunity (Abioro, Odunlami, & Ekpudu, 2019; CIPD, 2020).

Studies have indicated that the mere fact of categorization (between us and them) in the workplace is enough to cause conflict hence conflict is unavoidable (Lewis, French, & Steane, 1997; Rivers, 2005; Oachesu, 2016; CIPD, 2020). Rivers in his study termed this the social identity theory. He noted that this categorization is exactly what happens when groups representing different functions within an organization are formed and maintained that conflict is inevitable in a workplace (Rivers 2005). Girukwayo (2018a) observed that workplace conflict tends to manifest in two broad categories: First, it can be a conflict between individuals involving colleagues, employees and their managers. In this way, it may be that two workers simply do not get on; or that an individual has a grievance against their supervisor or manager or colleagues in the department, secondly, it can be between groups involving teams or large groups of employees and management. Conflict may take the form of rivalry between teams; or it may be apparent by the lack of trust and cooperation between large groups of employees and management (Girukwayo, 2018a). This paper focuses on these two types of conflict in the workplace and how they can be managed to achieve peaceful coexistence and promote health in the workplace.

Workplace conflict has been defined in several ways by many authors. Obi (2012) defined workplace conflict as an act of discontentment and contention which either the workers or employers of labour utilize to put excessive pressure against each other to get their demands. Kazimoto (2013) posited that 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 others' attempt to achieve objectives in an organization. It is also 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 (Olukayode, 2015). On this premise, workplace conflict within the context of this paper can be regarded as misunderstanding between individuals involving colleagues, employees and their managers or employers in an organization or workplace. Working in an organization means to be involved in a conflict as indicated earlier, hence conflict is inevitable. So, managers or employers and employees must learn how to address and manage conflict in an organization to enhance performance, peaceful coexistence and health promotion.

Peaceful co-existence is living together in peace rather than in constant hostility. A culture of peaceful co-existence encourages and fosters values, attitudes, traditions, behaviours and healthy lifestyle that rest on principles of human rights tolerance and non-violence (Reed, 2017). The following are tenets of peaceful co-existence: living in peace; loving and caring; caring and sharing; good neighbourliness; be your brother or sister"s keeper; respect other people's religion/beliefs; equality and mutual benefit; competition without war; benefits

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of dialogue; mutual non-aggression; tolerance for ethnic diversity; tolerate one another; say "No" to any form of violence; say "No" to any form of inhuman behaviour and accommodate individual differences (Reed, 2017). If all these can be achieved in the workplace both the health of the employers and employees in the workplace shall be enhanced, promoted and maintained and the issue of people dying in the workplace as a result of stress, anger, worry, suicide ideation and the attempt will be reduced (Reed 2017). Also, the preservation and promotion of peace in the workplace is the most significant factor for the attainment of health for all (World Health Organisation [WHO], 1999). Workplace health promotion is the combined efforts of employers, employees and society to improve the physical health, mental health and social/emotional health and well-being of people at work through conflict management (WHO, 2019).

Conflict management refers to techniques or strategies designed to reduce the negative effects and enhance the positive effects of conflict for all parties involved (Rahim, 2002). It is also the measures adopted to avoid conflict when possible, or strategies and approaches of containing (managing the conflict) when it occurs (Thakore, 2013; Oachesu, 2016).

Studies have identified different sources of workplace conflict to include: Communicational conflicts which include: affective conflict, substantive conflict, conflict of interest, conflict of values, goals conflict, realistic versus non-realistic conflict, retributive conflict, displaced conflict, misattributed conflict, and displaced conflict (theses are conflicts arising from misunderstandings); Intrapersonal conflict; interpersonal conflict, and inert - departmental conflict (these are conflicts from individual differences) (Thomas, 1999; Rahim, 2011; Thakore, 2013; Oachesu, 2016; Girukwayo, 2018a). This paper focused on the sources of conflict as highlighted above to explain how it affects individual performance in the workplace. Communicational conflicts arising from a misunderstanding as classified by Thomas (1999); Rahim (2011); Girukwayo, (2018a) are discussed in the succeeding sub-headings:

Affective conflict.

Affective conflict occurs when two interacting social entities while trying to solve a problem together, become aware that their feelings and emotions regarding some or all issues to the conflict are incompatible. This type of conflict is labelled psychological conflict, relationship conflict, emotional conflict or interpersonal conflict. This kind of conflict has an impact on the work results and the individual responsiveness to conflict situations (Rahim, 2011).

Substantive conflict.

The substantive conflict occurs when two or more organizational members disagree on their task or content issues (Rahim, 2011). Rahim characterized this type of conflict as disagreements among group members' ideas and opinions about the task being performed, such as disagreement regarding an organization's current strategic position or determining the correct data to include in a report. This type of conflict is labelled task conflict, cognitive conflict and issues conflict. This type of conflict is more common in the daily life of humans where work progress is subject to individual cooperation to effectively and efficiently produce results.

Conflict of interest.

This type of conflict occurs when each party sharing the same understanding of the situation, prefers a different and somewhat incompatible solution to a problem involving either a distribution of scarce resources between them or a decision to share the task of solving it. The common practice in the Public Service Sector points to where senior staff directs juniors but remain behind to observe how the young staff struggle with performance to meet targets and produce results. When such targets become untenable, the senior staff returns to the juniors for the blame ((Rahim, 2011; Girukwayo, 2018a).

Conflict of values.

This conflict occurs when two social entities differ in their values or ideologies on certain issues or aspects (Rahim, 2011). This is also called an ideological conflict. This conflict may affect employees work relationships when their ideological beliefs collide with institutional work requirements. Such a situation occurs in some counties where the law requires public servants to swear before assuming their responsibilities. As consequences, such a situation may happen to employees whose spiritual beliefs do not permit them to take an oath (Girukwayo, 2018a).

Goals conflict.

This occurs when a preferred outcome or an end-state of two social entities becomes incompatible. When one party perceives its interests to fall victim of denigration by the other party, victimization perception arises and then conflict occurs. When either party feels that its interests are being threatened or undermined, suspicion and mistrust crop up where the perceived victim feels intentionally despised by the non-victimized party (Rahim, 2011).

Realistic versus Non-Realistic conflict.

This is referred to as incompatibilities that have rational content (i.e tasks, goals, values, and means and ends). Non-realistic conflict occurs because of a party's need for releasing tension and expressing hostility, ignorance or error (Rahim, 2011). This type is like intrinsic and extrinsic conflicts. This paper, however, focused on realistic conflicts to determine the actual causes and provide proactive recommendations for solving conflicts at the workplace.

Retributive conflict.

Retributive conflict is characterized by a situation where the conflicting entities feel the need for drawn-out conflict to punish the opponent. In this aspect, each party determines its gains, in part, by incurring the cost of pursuing the punitive ways to the other party. This theory suggests that parties to the conflict may opt for all possible options leading to harming the other party morally, economically, and physically to mention a few. In the context of the workplace, the employee and employer conflict may result in prolonged court battles draining either party's coffers in pursuit of punitive measures to implicitly tell the other party of the adversary's powers to pursue the incompatible goal (Rahim, 2011; Girukwayo, 2018a).

Misattributed conflict.

This is related to the incorrect assignment or attribution of causes (behaviours, parties, or issues) to conflicts. The parties misattribute conflict causes to wrong factors, elements and parties. The point here is that conflict occurs where either party lacks the truth required by the assumed victim to deescalate conflict and cooperate in finding a durable solution (Rahim, 2011; Girukwayo, 2018a).

Displaced conflict.

This type of conflict occurs when the conflicting parties either direct their frustrations or hostilities to other parties that are not involved in the conflict or argue over secondary factors and not major issues or real causes of conflict (Rahim, 2011; Girukwayo, 2018).

Other sources of conflict as classified by Robin (1974); Thomas (1999); Onowu (2008); Rahim (2011); Girukwayo, (2018a) are: Intrapersonal conflict; interpersonal conflict, and inert - departmental conflict, these are discussed in the succeeding subheadings:

Intrapersonal conflict.

Intrapersonal conflict is predicated upon an incongruity between individual needs and organizational requirements. Intrapersonal conflict unfolds over time and manifests itself in a complex and multiform range of attitudinal and behavioural consequences. These may vary from psychosomatic consequences (e.g. frustration, emotional instability) to physical consequences (e.g. absenteeism, destructive behaviour). As such consequences are correlated with decreased performance and work-motivation, managing intrapersonal conflict will help the individual to promote his capacity for adaptation and attain equilibrium in his relationship with the organization and improves peaceful coexistence among workers.

Interpersonal conflict.

Interpersonal conflict emphasizes the interaction of human factors in an organisation. Onowu (2008) suggested two classes of factors as conflict sources. These are (a) Personal. Individuals are not identical, constant or consistent. When two individuals are brought together and kept together, each with his qualities, needs and skill, a conflict may ensue if their attributes do not mesh together in a coordinated way. Interaction between individuals with different attitudes, values and need can produce conflict behaviour and affect organisational performance; (b) Functional; Individuals in organisations have routes which are expected sets of behaviour associated with their position. In theory, individuals are not expected to engage in any discretionary behaviour. Such specification would consist of organisational preferences for consistency and predictability.

Interdepartmental conflict.

Organizations are designed around product lines, regions or technical specialities. These activities are assigned to departments that often have mutually exclusive structured interests and goals and that interact within a framework of scarce resources and task dependence (Onowu, 2008). So if resources are relatively fixed and when one department's gain is at the expense of another, conflict should be expected (Onowu, 2008). Other contextual factors which affect the interaction structure between departments and create the conditions for interdepartmental conflict include different attitudes between line managers and staff units, organizational size (directly related to the level of conflict), physical or communicational barriers between departments, unequal access to authority, rewards or organisational resources and ambiguity or uncertainty in assigning tasks or reward to different departments (Robin, 1974; Thomas, 1999; Onowu, 2008; Rahim, 2011; Girukwayo, 2018a).

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Management of Workplace Conflict for the Promotion of Health and Peaceful Coexistence

Strategies to manage conflicts at the workplace to enhance health promotion and peaceful coexistence as explained by Angelina and Muganza (2014) and Juneja (2015) are as follows: both the employers and employees must be treated as a part of one big family and must work together to achieve the goals of the organisation. Conflicts must be avoided at the workplace to ensure that the employees give their best for maximum productivity. Every individual has his style of working and reacting to any particular situation. Problems are bound to come when individuals work together. Never leave any problem unattended as a small problem can eventually become a major reason to worry later on. The problems must be addressed on an open platform and all related employees must be invited. Never discuss any problem separately with individuals as the other person might feel neglected. Prefer a conference room or the board room to discuss the problems and find a solution to it. Never always depend on verbal communications (Juneja, 2015). Official communications must be timely and preferably through emails, text messages, to involve all the participants as it is more reliable and transparent. Transparency must be maintained at all levels and superiors must be easily available to the subordinates to avoid confusions. Avoid unilateral decisions and always carry everyone along. Gossips and backbiting must be avoided in the workplace as it is considered seriously unprofessional and can lead to conflicts among individuals. As a Head of the Department try to avoid assigning duties to one person because he or she is closer to you. Engage every staff in duty and do not focus on one person. Good and healthy relationship improves health and people feel motivated to work as a group if everyone is involved and will strive hard to give the best possible results (Angelina Muganza, 2014; Juneja, 2015).

Other strategies for managing conflict in the workplace by Blake and Mouton (1964); Rahim (2002); Thakore, (2013); Chandolia & Anastasiou (2020) are discussed as follows:

Avoiding.

Avoidance is a managing conflict style whereby an individual does not succeed in or avoids adequately addressing a conflict but instead postpones, withdraws, or sidesteps. In most cases, individuals will tend to avoid conflict due to fear of getting involved in the dispute or they may lack the confidence in their managing conflict skills (Laoulakou, 2017; Chandolia & Anastasiou, 2020). Rahim observed that the basic goal of the avoidance is to delay hence some persons would rather hide and ignore conflict than resolve it (Rahim, 2002). Avoiding strategy may help to maintain relationships that would be hurt by conflict resolution and a very effective way to affront conflictive situations in short term (Rahim, 2002).

Smoothing.

Smoothing in conflict management refers to the conciliation that occurs when one person or group is willing to yield to the other. The Smoothing-Accommodating style accommodates concerns of 'others first' instead of giving one's interests top priority (Karanikola, Nikos, Panagiotopoulos, 2018; Chandolia & Anastasiou, 2020). An appropriate time to use this style is when maintaining the relationship outweighs other considerations, when suggestions or changes are not important to the accommodator, when time is limited or when harmony and stability are valued (Rahim, 2002; Thakor, 2013).

Forcing.

It designates a situation in which one person or group attempts to acquire complete dominance. Individuals do not hesitate to use aggressive behaviour to resolve conflict. The individual assumes that conflict is settled by one person winning and one person losing and they want to be the winner and creating a win-lose situation (Rahim, 2002; Thakore, 2013). They observed that winning gives a sense of pride and achievement while losing gives an individual a sense of weakness, inadequacy or failure.

Compromising.

Compromising is a conflict managing approach aimed at finding a solution that is mutually acceptable and expedient and partially satisfies both the involved parties (Saiti, 2015; Vestal & Torres, 2016; Wu, Zhao, & Zuo, 2017; Chen, Xu, & Phillips, 2019). This type of compromise is known as integrative bargaining in which both sides win in a way (Rahim, 2002).

The diagram shows that workplace conflict can be managed through avoidance, smoothing, forcing and compromising. Avoiding is an attempt to manage interpersonal conflict by withdrawal or ignoring it. Smoothing involves emphasis of common, organisational interests and yielding by one or both parties. Forcing is the situation in which one person or group attempts to acquire complete dominance. The individual assumes that conflict is settled by one person winning and one person losing and they want to be the winner and creating a win-lose situation. Compromise is an attempt to manage conflict by expecting each person to give up something.

Robbins (1974); Thomas (1999); Rahim (2011); Girukwayo, (2018b) further classified strategies for management of intrapersonal conflict; interpersonal conflict, and interdepartmental conflict. These are discussed as follows:
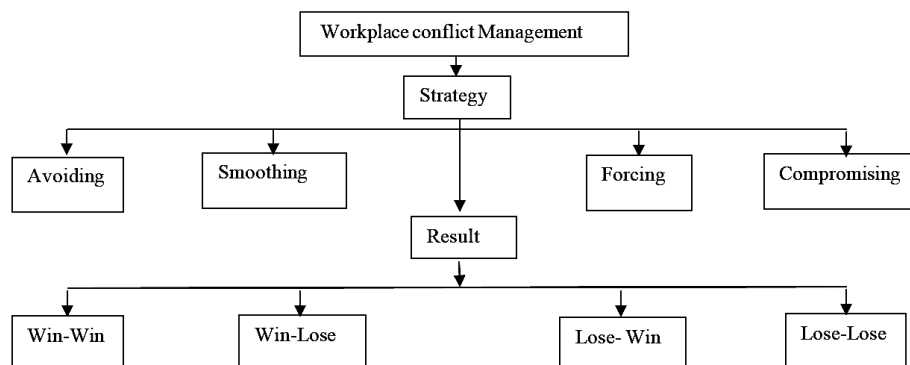
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Figure I: *Diagrammatic representation of the Workplace Conflict adapted from* (Rahim, 2011).

Managing intrapersonal conflict.

When a person experiences an inner conflict and feels that he cannot master his situation, or change his environment, two types of conflict management can be employed such as cognitive strategies and behavioural strategies. Cognitive strategies, often called defence mechanisms, help an individual to falsify, distort or deny a particular conflict. Cognitive strategies represent an attempt to control or manage negative and disturbing feelings associated with conflict and to allow an individual to carry on with his normal activities. Behavioural strategies for coping with intrapersonal conflict include escape, withdrawal and aggression (especially against convenient targets) (Janis & Mann, 1977).

Managing interpersonal conflict.

A great deal of individual behaviour takes place in a workplace (university, hospital, factory) in which they occupy various positions. To avoid detrimental effects on the individual as well as organisational functioning, administrators need to identify the causes of interpersonal conflict and take appropriate action to deal with it. Blake and Mouton (1964) have suggested five possible modes of conflict management as Avoiding, smoothing, compromise, forcing and problem-solving which were earlier discussed in this paper.

Interdepartmental conflict.

Traditional approaches to managing interdepartmental conflict emphasized such methods as conflict avoidance (separating departments by relocating them physically); regulating a conflict by introducing new rules and procedures; seeking a form of "legalistic" solution (by appealing to higher management authorities); using departmental representatives to reach a compromise agreement or seeking mediation or arbitration from an outside body. Such conflict management methods may indeed produce an agreement.

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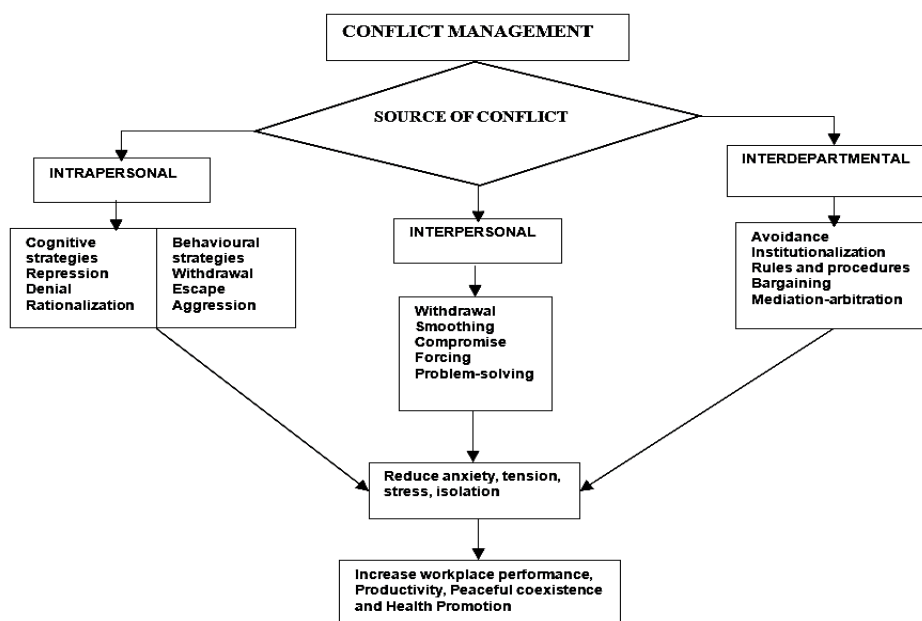
Conclusion

Conflict has been observed as part of the workplace or organisational life, and a common occurrence at the workplace. The way and manner through which conflict is been resolved or managed in an organization will determine the level of coherence, work performance, productivity and peaceful coexistence within the workplace. This paper focused on conflict management as a factor in the promotion of health and peaceful coexistence in the workplace. The paper examined different sources of conflict in an organization and strategies for effective management of conflict in the workplace. The employers and employees must explore various sources and strategies of conflict management as suggested in this paper for effective management of conflict in the workplace to enhance performance, peaceful coexistence and health promotion.

Recommendations

Based on the issues discussed, the authors recommend that:
1. The management or head of the department or administrators, employers and employees must take the offensive and seek to manage conflict in line with the strategies suggested in this paper to ensure peaceful coexistence and health promotion in the workplace.
2. Proper communication procedures should be put in place to resolve conflict. For instance, when any disagreements arise among the employees, it should be reported to the management and then management should get statements from the parties involved, brainstorm the issue and make recommendations on how to resolve the conflict.
3. 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 to learn about conflict and how it can be effectively managed.

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