Conflict Resolution and its Implications: An Organisational Paradigm

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Abstract
*The notion of conflict and its resolution both within the paradigms of the wider society and the narrow confines of the organisation are examined in the light of current thinking. An expose of the consequences and/or implications of this discourse is presented. The paper proposes that positionally, a conflict and a disagreement in general terms, are synonyms rather than antonyms; and that they are a **sine qua non** of human behaviour. From conceptual and methodological standpoints, two main dimensions underlying the intentions of the groups involved in a conflict situation are isolated. Finally, these two main dimensions ultimately produce five conflict-handling modes in organisations; and these modes are discussed contemporaneously.*

Keywords: *Conflict, Organisational Paradigm, Resolution*

Introduction

It is almost a truism to say that we   n "organisational society". Similarly, organisations of all types intimately affect our lives from the day we first go to school to the organisations in which we earn our living or spend our leisure times, to the organisations that may care for us in old age and in which we may die.

People may associate together sensibly and in a humanitarian fashion, or their ways of organising may be exasperating or degrading both for those they serve

and those who work and live alongside them. (Aibieyi & Okojie, 2006). The purpose of this paper is threefold:

- To re-examine in a broad general sense the concept of conflict in the light of current organisational thinking
- To look at how the notion/or construct of conflict is operationalized in terms of the concept of organisational societies
- To discuss the consequences for organisational societies of the conflict resolving approaches.

It is important to state that we cannot attempt a discourse of an organisational paradigm of conflict resolution and its implications without understanding first what notion means, who causes it within the context of the wider society and with special references to organisational societies.

Definition of a Conflict

According to Megginson (1983), a conflict is any kind of opposition or antagonistic interaction between two or more parties. Positionally, a conflict and a disagreement are synonymous and are phenomena immanent in human societies and lives. A conflict is a sine qua non of human behaviour and life. (Leininger, 1975).

Equally important is the fact that one of the variables which negate productivity in organisations whether it is profit making or non-profit making organisations is conflict either between individuals or groups of individuals. This is why the resolution of conflicts in organisation forms an important function of line and staff managers, which in turn promotes organisational productivity.

One important point to be mentioned here is that there are different hierarchies of conflict and its management. Thus, it could be intra-personal; inter-personal; inter-disciplinary, intra-organisational; inter-organisational or it could even be international. Moreover, a conflict could be positive or negative. In other words, a conflict could be functional or dysfunctional, and the dividing line between the two is thin and different in every conflict situation.

Oyibo (1997) has argued that conflicts between non-academics and academics over entitlements to parity of salaries in the Nigerian university system could be functional if they decide to resolve the issue in a give and take manner, but its dysfunctional conflict may result in low productivity, loss of human energy (expanded in plotting of defences); loss of time and money; decreased co-operation; low moral; resentment and frustration. By contrast, functional conflict results in creativity; increased motivation, increased participation and

productivity. For this reason therefore, an organisation needs conflict if it is to survive (Lewis, 1976).

Organisational Conflicts And Their Sources
Whilst conflicts in organisations and their sources are multifarious, the under-listed may be regarded as some of their sources:

1. **Management Of Organisational Resources**
   The usual and familiar organisational resources are manpower; finance; material; information and time. If these resources are managed poorly, conflict and/or disagreement may result. Examples of such conflicts are:
   - Lack of concern for employee welfare. For example, the non-provision of welfare services.
   - Inefficient wages and salary administration
   - Poor human relations
   - Greed in the management of organisational resources
   - Lateness to work or absenteeism
   - Poor industrial relations
   - Poor attitude to work
   - Poor or absence of communication between super-ordinates and sub-ordinates.

2. **Leadership Style of the Leader**
   The style of leadership adopted by the leader frequently generates conflicts in organisations. For example, a leader may adopt the authoritarian style of leadership contrary to the expectations of his subordinates who are in favour of a democratic or participative organizational climate.

3. **Power Struggle Between individuals and/or Groups within the organisation**
   Another source of orgaisational conflicts is power struggle between individuals or groups within the organisation. Thus, struggle to become the chairman of the National Union of Road and Transport Workers (N.U.R.T.W) or president of a Trade Union Organisation (TUO) are classic examples of power struggles in organisational settings.

4. **Communication Conflict**
   Conflict arising out of communication is an off-shoot of misunderstanding in the communication process. This could be as a result of misunderstanding due to semantics (i.e. meaning of words), physical barriers, psychological barriers or hoarding of information. An example of this is the horns effect (natural hatred) which leads to poor or lack of communication or it could be a deliberate hoarding of information for selfish reasons. It is to be noted that

communication is the process of passing information and understanding from one person to another (Davis, 1995).

5. **Role Conflict**

Lewis (1976) defines "Role Conflict" as the simultaneous occurrence of two or more role expectations such that compliance with one would make compliance more difficult with the other". This can be illustrated with a departmental line manager for example, a head of department in a university, who sees his duty among others as initiation and active participation in the recruitment of staff for his department, and the resource persons manager who sees the role of the head of department as only nominal in the recruitment process and therefore process and therefore not invited to participate in the process.

6. **Value Conflict**

Another major source of organisational conflicts is what can be called value conflict. This may result from differences in values between individuals, groups or organisations. These value differences may be related to ideaological or philosophical backgrounds. An example would be the chief executive who claims he is all in all, whereas his immediate sub-ordinate claims that he is an important link in the chain of administration, and therefore he cannot be side-lined by the chief executive.

An Examination Of The Theories Of Conflict

Theoretically speaking, various academic disciplines have operationalised conflict from their own individual academic standpoints. For instance, scientific management and human relations have a belief that all conflicts are dysfunctional. They go so far as to prescribe that all forms of that conflict should be eradicated from the organisation. Furthermore, that it is the manager's role to rid an organisation of strife. Thus, they anchor their conflict management concept on legitimacy of authority; delegation of authority and responsibilities; careful recruitment of employees; clarity of chain of command, clear job description and the appropriate use of the reward and punishment systems.

In contrast, the behaviourist's model of conflict maintains that conflict is inevitable in organisations. They therefore accept conflict as a part and parcel of organisations. However, like the scientific management and human relations model, they also believe that all conflicts are dysfunctional. They therefore focus on the elimination of conflicts from the organisation.

The sociologist position regards conflicts not only as an inherent aspect of an organisation, but as an absolute necessity of functional conflict; explicitly

encourages functional oppositions; defines conflict management to include stimulation as well as resolution methods; and considers the management of conflict as a major responsibility of all administrators (Robbins, 1974).

It should be emphasized that this model of conflict in an organisation is a continuum, that is, at the one extreme it may be too high and in this case, it requires a resolution; and at the other extreme it may be too low and requires stimulation in this situation.
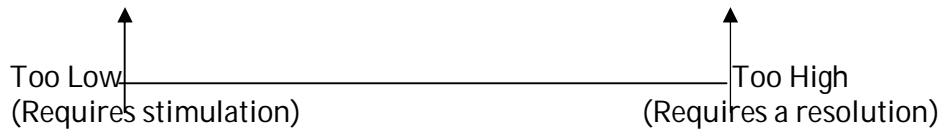Illustrated graphically the model would look this:

Too Low | _____ | Too High
(Requires stimulation)   (Requires a resolution)

Fig 1.1: Conflict Continuum in an organisation.
Source: Oyibo, E.E (1997) "Organisational Theories and Application"

Intergroup Conflict Management And Consequences Of Intergroup Conflicts In Organisations
In this section of the paper, an attempt is made to look at the process of managing inter group conflicts and the consequences of intergroup conflicts and competitions within the theoretical framework of organisational settings.

Managing Intergroup Conflicts
Okojie (2011) in his work in this area, referring to the work of Bowditch and Buono (1990), argues that to some extent, conflict between groups in organisations is unavoidable. Thus, given the differentiation that exists in today's complex organisations, the integration and co-ordination of different groups within an organisation can be difficult. Following in the tradition of Bowditch and Buono (1990); Okojie (2011), reasons that rather than thinking in terms of totally resolving or eliminating such conflicts, we can examine a number of different ways in which the groups deal with such conflicts.
As can see from the figure below, there are two main dimensions underlying the intentions of the groups involved in a conflict situation. They are:
- Co-operativeness: This implies the willingness or readiness of one group within the organisation to assent and/or satisfy the other group's concerns.
- Assertiveness: This relates to the group's attempts to satisfy its own concerns (of co-operativeness). The result is that these two dimensions are reflected in five conflict-handling modes:

- Avoiding: This has to do with an unassertive, uncooperative approach in which both groups neglect the concern involved by sidestepping the issue or postponing the conflict by choosing not to deal with it.
- Competing: This concept refers to a situation where an assertive, uncooperative mode in which the groups attempt to achieve their own goals at the expense of the others through argument, authority, threat or even physical force. This can be diagrammed as follows plotting assertiveness against.

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A
S
S      High •   Competing
S                                    Collaboration
E
R
T                        Compromising
I                              •
V          .
E          Avoiding                        Accommodation
N                                               •
E      Low │ •              High
S          └─────────────────────────────
S          Low
S
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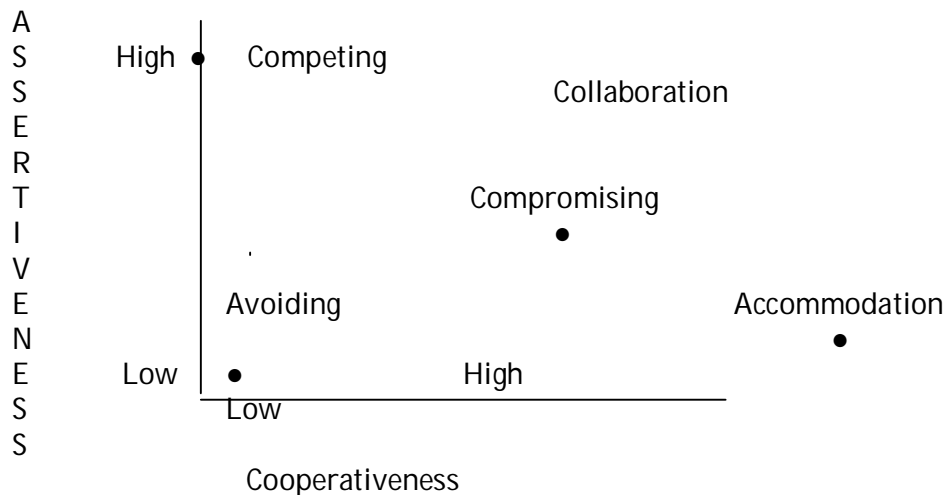
Cooperativeness

Fig 1.2: Two-dimensional model of ways to handle conflict.
Source: (Oyibo, 1997).

- Accommodating: This is a situation where an unassertive, co-operative position or group attempts to satisfy the concerns of the other by neglecting its own concerns or goals.
- Compromising: This refers to an intermediate approach in which partial satisfaction is sought through a middle ground" position that reflects mutual sacrifice. This position or stance is therefore intermediate between assertiveness and cooperativeness because each group makes some concessions but also receives some concessions from the other.
- Collaborating: This is an assertive, co-operative mode that attempts to satisfy the concerns of both groups. Such mutual satisfaction involves an agreement to confront the conflict, identification of the concerns of the different groups, and problem solving to find alternatives that would satisfy groups.

It should be mentioned that each of these modes is used at one time or another and the appropriateness of the style depends on the nature of the situation. For example, if the conflict is relatively minor, avoiding it altogether or accommodating the concerns of the other group is "right." Competing would appear to be more appropriate. For more significant situations, where the concerns of the groups involved are too important to be compromised, collaboration is the ideal. This has the advantage of leading to greater learning, commitment and insight into the different perspectives, (Egwu & Okojie, 2012). However, the important point to note is that conflicts between groups in organisational settings should be viewed or regarded as a natural process that merges out the day to day workings of groups within organisations, and it can be dealt with in a number of different ways.

Intergroup Conflict And Its Consequences On Organisations
As was mentioned before, conflict has been typically and traditionally viewed and looked upon as being dysfunctional (or "bad") and harmony between different groups as functional [(or "good"). (Oyibo, 1997)], (Okojie 2011). Similarly, it has been pointed out that there are dysfunctional consequences of never having conflicts or suppressing conflicts, just as there can be functional and dysfunction conflict can be seen in the current debate between the automobile industry and the federal government over pollution and safety standards and regulations in the U.S.A. Some of the benefits (functional aspects) of these conflicts are safer cars and newer ones, more efficient engines. One of the costs (systematic dysfunctions) has been much more expensive automotive transportation because of the enforced research and development into safety and pollution control. Thus, the outcome or consequence of this conflict process has both benefits and costs for the groups involved, which can be shared by the group through compromise or reduced through a collaborative exploration of innovative safety and pollution devices or approaches. When such a conflict is dealt with mainly through competition, however, the outcomes for the groups involved can only reduce the potential for future cooperation and collaboration, but alter the dynamic and interactions of both intra and intergroup behaviours as well. In fact, there are a number of observable phenomena that occur within and between competing groups, and within winning and losing groups. If a group perceives itself to be losing it can begin to take on the characteristics of losing groups. This tendency, however, depends more on a group's self-perception of how it is doing than on the actual fact of winning or losing (Egwu & Okojie, 2012).

Although it may be desirable to have groups compete against one another (e.g. sales contests between different departments), the resulting tensions, perceptual distortions, and negative stereotyping can precipitate a host of organisational

problems (Tharmanligan & Bhatti, 2014). There are however, a number of different ways in which such dysfunctional competitions can be minimized. The use of liaisons or linking pins to coordinate the activities of the groups; overlapping group memberships that can develop an appreciation of the concerns of the other group; joint meetings or task forces locating a common enemy external to the orgnisation that can shift the consequence of intergroup competition from inside an organisation to between different organisations; and the development of super-ordinate goals that require a collaborative effort.

TABLE 1-1 Observable Consequences of Intergroup Competition

WITH COMPETING GROUPS	BETWEEN COMPETING GROUP
Groups become more cohesive	Each group perceives other group as the enemy, not as a neutral group.
Group norms demand more loyalty from members; deviance is not tolerated	Each group perceives the best in themselves and the worst in other groups- "groupthink" and negative stereotypes occur.
Group climate becomes very businesslike-task needs increase and social needs are left unattended	Hostility increases while communication decreases
Group members tolerate more task oriented, autocratic leadership as opposed to democratic leadership.	When competing groups are forced into interaction, group members listen to their own spokesperson and arguments, and not to those from the competing groups
Group structure becomes apparent, roles are more formalised.	

Within Winning Groups	Within Losing Groups
Groups remain cohesive and become more tightly knit	Groups find ways to attribute loss to others, the situation, the judges and so forth.
Social needs are addressed at this point; members become more playful and more relaxed	Tends to splinter; unresolved personal conflict surfaces about strategy, what led to the loss, and so forth
High intragroup cooperation; low task interest	If the group is not completely demoralized, it tends to work harder, to learn the rules to become political
Group members think that their sterotypes about themselves and others	Group members tend initially towards low intragroup cooperation and

have been confirmed-they are "good" and others are "bad"	concern for member needs, and more concern for working harder
	Group members learn about themselves from having their self image disconfirmed by the loss; loss is likely to regroup and be more effective if the loss is realistically accepted

Source: Edgar Schein, Organisational Psychology (Eaglewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1980).

Conflict Resolving Techniques In Societal Groups And Organisations
Oyibo (1997); Nwokolo (2009), postulate that the under mentioned techniques are those commonly used in the resolution of conflicts both in the wider society and organisational settings:

- **Problem Solving/Confrontation Approach**
  The parties confront each other face-to-face regarding the areas of conflict. They delineate and discuss them candidly in a give and take fashion. Mutual trust, respect and long-lasting agreement result from it.

- **Super-ordinate Goals Approach**
  Super-ordinate goals are goals which the confronting parties desire but which they cannot achieve without the cooperation of the other party involved (Robbin, 1974). These goals are highly valued and commonly sought, but unattainable without the cooperation of the other party. For example, management-employees union negotiation. Both employees and management need more money, but management (organisation) is financially broke, therefore the union has to accept less pay than they normally would have bargained for in order that the organisation and eventually they themselves might survive.

- **Mediation and Arbitration (Compromise) Methods**
  These methods are commonly employed in management-labour conflicts. A mediator is a neutral third party who offers suggestions on ways to reconcile the differences. This is sometimes referred to as compromise method. The arbitrator, however, determines settlements that both parties must consider and accept. His decisions have legal backing.

- **Authoritative Mandates (Forcing)**

This is based on the use of formal authority. In forcing, one party uses superior authority to impose a solution. The success level is only short-term; it does not remove the cause of the problem.

- **Friendly Persuasion and use of Interpersonal Skills**
  In this approach a combination of gentle persuasion, subtle included influences, and personal appeals are employed. This requires the application of human relations skills, and it is quite successful.

- **Avoiding and Smoothing**
  In avoiding, one of the parties withdraws from the conflict and suppresses its conflicting feelings. Smoothing is the process of playing down the differences that exist between the parties while emphasising the common interests. These are transient conflict resolving methods.

- **Alteration of Human Variables (Behaviour Modification)**
  This means changing the behaviour of one or more of the parties involved. It is difficult to attain, but once attained, it results in a long-term and meaningful harmony.

- **Rail-Roading**
  This is a conflict and disagreement –resolving technique usually employed by a powerful minority to silence the majority, or a powerful chief executive to silence his subordinates. They/he intimidate the majority and use administrative machinery to block opposition. Consequently, the majority is forced to remain silent or to compromise. For example, the doctors in the hospital organisation forcing their minority decision on the nurses who are in the majority. The end-result is bad feeling in the mind of the majority against the minority, resentment, and low morale, frustration and low productivity.

- **Impeachment**
  The word "impeachment" means a formal written accusation by, say, a lower house of a legislative body charging a civil officer with bribery treason, or high crimes while in office. This is followed by a trial. Under the United States Constitution, the House of Representatives has the sole power of impeachment. If articles of impeachment are approved by the House, they are presented to the senate by a House Committee, which serves as the prosecutor. A two-third vote of senate is required for conviction in any charge.

Historically, impeachment dates from medieval England, where it has been replaced by ministerial accountability to parliament.

Nigeria borrowed it from the American Constitution (Ademiluyi & Imhonpi, 2011). For over two centuries of American Independence, it is on record that "a total of twelve Federal Officers have been impeached and four of them, all judges, were convicted".

In 1968, President Andrew Johnson was tried and acquitted by a single over. On August 8, 1974, 11 days after the House Judicial Committee adopted the first of three impeachment articles, President Richard M. Nixon Resigned.

What we learn from this record is that in England where it originated, it has been replaced by accountability to parliament. In America where it is in existence, and from where we borrowed it, it is used with the greater caution and rarely employed. But in Nigeria, it has become the vogue in parliamentary process. Why? Is it a panacea-a remedy to all conflicts and disagreements in civilian administration? Surely it is not. It has no advantage over other problem solving techniques. Infact, the end-result is bad feeling and perpetual hatred in the mind of the impeached official whether the impeachment succeeds or not.

While it is a good weapon against official misbehaviour, it should be used with the greater caution and very rarely.

All the conflict resolving techniques that have been discussed could be classified into three methods according to the outcome of the resolution:

Win-lose Methods: These are methods that result in win-lose outcomes. The strategies that fall under this are authoritative mandates, Rail-roading and impeachment. The principle of rail-roading and authoritative mandates is based on "you must follow my orders because I am/we are your superior officer(s)". The end-result of these methods (Authoritative mandates, Rail-roading and impeachment) are non-productive behaviours by the losers, lowered energy input, non-creativity, resentment, frustration and eventually, low productivity.

Lose-Lose Methods: These methods are based on the notion of "half-a-bread is better than none". The strategies that yield this type of outcome are super-ordinate goals approach, mediation (compromise) and arbitration. The end-results of these approaches are short-terms.

Win-Win Methods: These are methods that give parties a feeling of equal victory-no victor, no vanquished.

These include the following strategies:

a. Consensus decisions-decisions which occur as a result of their simultaneous acceptability by both parties as in problem solving/confrontation approach
b. Integrative decision making: This involves joint identification by both parties of their common needs and values, as may occur also in problem solving.
c. Friendly persuasion and use of interpersonal skills behaviour modification
d. Smoothing-playing down differences and emphasizing common interests.

The Win-win approaches result in ego boosting, increased motivation, creativity, increased participation and productivity for members of both parties. Definitely, they enhance management-subordinate relationships and productivity of the organisation.

Concluding Comments
It is axiomatic to say that the literature on conflict, its management, resolution, consequences and foci is replete with different models, theories and formulations directed at the group level, through organisational to the societal levels. It is also true to say that conflict is an inevitable construct that is immanent in the social fabric of mankind. And since the realization of this consciousness, efforts have been and are still being made to conceptualise it from every conceivable standpoint.

The perspective of this paper although has been primarily the organisational and societal aspects of its formulations, the approach has been many sided, manifold and eclectic. For example, from the standpoints of the organisation and society, the paper looked at different levels and types of inter dependence. It took a step further to operationalise how conflict can be managed and some of the outcomes or consequences of inter-group conflicts.

It is important to mention that in contemporary complex organisations, an effective firm requires the effective and efficient interactions of a number of different groups throughout its organisational hierarchy.

Following in the tradition of Oyibo (1997), the sociological philosophy of conflict has re-oriented managers and employees to a new concept of conflict in the organisation whether it is profit making or nonprofit making. Thus, the current thinking in the literature is that conflict is an inherent aspect of every organisation and indeed, an inherent component of every group and society. Another thinking in the literature is that dysfunctional conflict should be resolved, whilst functional

conflict should be accepted and even encouraged if its level is too low in the organisation.

It is the opinion of this paper, that both management and employees of an organisation (whether it is a public or private sector organisation), should be interested in the goals of the organisation. Furthermore, the paper posits that they should accept and accommodate conflict within the organisational society, whilst dysfunctional conflict should be resolved smoothly and quickly through the "win-win" approaches in order to promote higher productivity and co-operativeness.

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