Conflict Management Strategies and Performance in an Organization: A Study of Rivers State ministry of justice, 2013 – 2023.

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Abstract

This study determined which strategies are used to manage and resolve conflicts in Rivers State ministry of justice. The study made use of Structural-Functionalism Theory. Correlation research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study consists of one hundred and ninety nine (199) staff of Rivers State Ministry of Justice. The sample size of the study was one hundred (100) respondents making 50% of the total population. The instrument used for eliciting responses from the respondents was a questionnaire. The reliability index was established using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions while Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. Findings revealed that that The result showed that there is a positive and strong significant conflict management strategies managers use in solving conflict with p-value (0.00) < 0.05, then hypothesis one is retained at the 0.05 significance level. The study concluded that the conflict management strategies are crucial for the attainment and achievement of organizational goals and objectives. In other words, if the management is not knowledgeable in conflict resolution strategies, it will affect the performance of organizations negatively but if conflict is constructively managed, it will enhance organizational performance. The study recommended among others that the management should be flexible in adopting conflict management strategies that will improve on the Performance of the Organization

Keywords: Conflict, Management Strategies and Organization.

Introduction

Every organization encounters conflicts on a regular basis. Conflicts are unavoidable, but it can be managed in such a way of early detection. It is vital to keep track of the organizational signals that indicate the presence of conflict on a constant basis. If organization does not respond appropriately, they may have created a risk situation in which the conflicts can cause problem in the organization. Conflicts as an independent variable of organizational behavior are also one of the most important predictors of productivity, work contentment, efficiency and performance. There may have been a positive impact on dependent variables through systematic research on organizational behavior through a good understanding of individual factors of organizational behavior. Conflicts of interest undoubtedly arises as a result of the structurally varied nature of today's work place organizations whether in the manufacturing or service industries. Lack of freedom, position, and resources emerge those conflicts of interest in communities (Hotepo et al. 2010; & Ike, 2010).

Organizational conflict is thus prevalent in workplace, despite the best management strategies in place, and presents itself in a variety of ways as an inherent and inescapable element of work relationships. It is a natural process that occurs more frequently in hierarchical organizations where people with different perspectives, opinions, and backgrounds interact. Alternatively, conflict in the workplace is not an anomaly since it develops or provides an opportunity for correction and reconciliation for the benefit of the employees and organization as well (Ayoko, 2017). Organizational conflict is defined as the presence of disagreement that develops when the aims, interests, or values of different individuals or groups are incompatible and hinder one other's efforts to fulfill organizational objectives (Kazimoto, 2013). Conflict initiates communication process and an unavoidable result of transactional relationships that manifests as disagreement and discord between individuals and groups in Organization. Organizational conflict will always exist in any business as long as individuals struggle for jobs, power, recognition, and security (Bercovitch, 2014). As a result, the job of management is to manage disputes rather than suppress or resolve them in order to improve organizational performance and protect harm in any sense. Awan and Anjum (2015) stated that properly managed conflict promotes open communication, collaborative decision making, regular feedback, and timely

resolution of conflict. Open communication and collaboration enhance the flow of new ideas and strengthen work relationship, which can have a positive effect on employee morale. Regular feedback and timely resolution of conflict has the potential of improving employee satisfaction and job performance.

Obasan (2011) revealed that good conflict management strategies show flaws in corporate decision-making, prompting the establishment to make changes and seek constructive solutions. As a result, management has a responsibility to effectively resolve conflict for the sake of improving organizational performance through improved communication, management of time, cooperation, and productivity of the organization. For conflict to be reduced in an organization, there should be a continually development of effective strategies for managing conflict in order to meet predetermined standards and objectives. Awan and Ibrahim (2015) contend that if the individuals do not have the communication or interpersonal skills to resolve their disputes, the conflict can grow and spread to others, eventually affecting their job performance, which, in turn, affects the job satisfaction of others, as well in addition to the staff not having the communication skills to address their disputes, their leaders often lack the necessary skills to be effective in conflict resolution. Once human resources personnel are involved, the process becomes punitive and results in disciplinary action, which contributes to an even greater reduction in employee morale and employee satisfaction. Within any organization, there are usually different positions and jobs. People occupying these positions have different perceptions, goals, thought and concerns. It is difficult to conceptualize society or an organization without inherent differences and contradictions and these leads to conflict.

Organizations have long been concerned about the impact of conflict management strategies on its performance because empirical validity of findings is limited at best modest in civil service. There is always a need for conducting empirical research to focus the light on public sector.

Objectives of the Study

The aim of the study is to access the relationship between conflict management strategies and performance in an organization, a Study of Rivers State ministry of

justice, 2013 – 2023. Following directly from the aim the key objectives of the study are to:

1. ascertain the major causes of conflict in Rivers State ministry of justice.
2. assess the effect of conflict on performance of employees in Rivers State ministry of justice.

Theoretical Framework

Structural-Functionalism Theory

The study is focused on Structural-Functionalism Theory developed by Talcott Parsons (1960). The theory postulates that individuals normally adjust to a given structure in an organisation but any change in the structure of the organisation causes conflict and destabilizes the organisation. Conflict should be minimized by minimizing structural changes in order to maintain stability with both the individuals as well as the organisation. The relevance of the theory to the study is that it stresses on ways of handling conflicts in an organization. Functionalism became important when Da¡win's evolutionary theories began to influence thinking about human behavior Darwin conceived ofthe idea of survival in functional terms. Each function was important to the survival of the whole system. Systems that could not adapt their functions ceased to exists.

Other students of human behavior borrowed these ideas, applying them to social affairs. Thus, social Darwinism imposed these same functionalist categories into social analysis. Social Darwinists claimed that society benefited from unrestrained competition between units, that functional adaptability was required for survival, and that attempts to protect the weak hampered the functioning of society as a whole. These ideas first influenced anthropology and then sociology. Implicitly through the works of Émile Durkheim and explicitly through Parsons (1951) and Robert Merton (1968), these ideas became central to the social sciences. Almond's "Introduction" to the Politics of Developing Areas (Almond & Coleman, I 960), applied functionalist ideas to political life.

Literature Review

The Concept of Organizational Conflict

Schramm-Nielsen (2002) Defines a conflict as a state of serious disagreement and argument about something perceived to be important by at least one of the parties

involved while Azemosa (2004) says organizational conflict is in opposition between individual owners and managers on one hand and working people on the other. Adesina (2009) in his view of conflict posits that it is the striking together, mutual interference of opposing or incompatible forces, ideas, interest content, discard. Often times conflict either overtly or covertly manifest themselves thereby enabling people to sense their existence. Conflict can occur with: An individual; this is known as intra-personal conflict, between two groups; this is known as inter personal, between or among groups of people, units or department, this is known as inter group or unit conflict, between or among different organizations or nations, this is known as international conflict.

Organizational conflicts seem unavoidable since the concerns of management is to maximize profit while labour is concerned with the best conditions for their services. In this process, conflicts emerge between the social partners in an effort of each partner to obtain maximum benefits of the other. Organizational conflict is a breakdown in the standard mechanism of decision making which leads an individual or group to experience difficulty in selecting a mutually acceptable alternative (Fujana, 1997). Organizational conflicts do arise within the rank and file of all the actors in the organization including the entire constituent of the whole set of individuals. Such conflicts are referred to as inter personal. It also involves an organized group of individuals acting concertedly. Umana and Okafor (2019) asserts that group decision-making requires careful deliberation and is most advantageous when participants generate answers from a list of choices without prejudice. However, group related thoughts may be the root cause of conflict and can wreak havoc when it occurs undetected, where minority opinions are stifled.

Conflict Management Strategies

Conflict management implies integration of all factors which can contribute to conflict resolution or its prevention. Those factors are improvement of communication and practicing discipline in the organization, as well as having in mind the life phases of parties included. Thomas (1992) identified two primary conflict handing intentions namely; Cooperativeness and Assertiveness. Cooperativeness means the extent to which the individual attempts to satisfy the other person's concerns; while Assertiveness means the extent to which the individual attempts to satisfy his/her own concerns. These two basic dimensions

of behaviour can be used to define five specific methods of dealing with conflicts, as shown below:

Competing
Is assertive and uncooperative, an individual pursues their own concerns at the other person's expense. This is a power-oriented mode, in which one uses whatever power seems appropriate to win one's own position, one's ability to argue, one's rank, economic sanctions. Competing might mean "standing up for your rights," defending a position which you believe is correct or simply trying to win.

Accommodating
Accommodating is unassertive and cooperative, the opposite of competing. When accommodating, an individual neglects their own concerns to satisfy the concerns of the other person; there is an element of self-sacrifice in this mode. Accommodating might take the form of selfless generosity or charity, obeying another person's order when one would prefer not to, or yielding to another's point of view. Accommodating approach to conflict management is considered to be empathy driven because of its non-assertive nature. It is sometimes referred to as the smoothing strategy (Hussein et al., 2017). Accommodation strategy seeks to provide solution to conflict situation by neglecting one's own personal demand or interest just to satisfy the demand of the other party., Vigil- King (2000) argued that the adoption of accommodation strategy in managing conflict is likely to create better results and higher commitment in individuals than teams using non-integrative conflict management approach.

Avoiding
Avoiding is unassertive and uncooperative - the individual does not immediately pursue their own concerns of those of the other person. They do not address the conflict. Avoiding might take the form of diplomatically side-stepping an issue, postponing an issue until a better time, or simply withdrawing from a threatening situation.

Collaborating

Collaborating is both assertive and cooperative, the opposite of avoiding. Collaborating involves an attempt to work with the other person to find some solution which fully satisfies the concerns of both persons. It means digging into an issue to identify the underlying concerns of the two individuals and to find an alternative which meets both sets of concerns. Collaborating between two persons might take the form of exploring a disagreement to learn from each other's insights, concluding to resolve some condition which would otherwise have them competing for resources, or confronting and trying to find a creative solution to an interpersonal problem.

Salami (2009) stated that the adoption of collaboration strategy in the management of conflict situation ranks high on both assertiveness and cooperativeness. Calha (2017) sees collaboration strategy as an affirmative and obliging means of conflict management which usually results in a win-win settlement. Similarly, McShane and Von Glinow (2000) added that collaboration carries the highest level of win/win orientation that brings about information sharing, openness, and clarification of issues at the point of conflict to come up with solution acceptable to both parties. Snell (2002) opined that collaboration serves to maintain and strengthen work relationships for both parties. It allows people in conflict to subsume their original interest and then work in synergy to achieve a common goal. Consequently, Hotepo, et al (2010) argued that effective use of collaborative strategy may result in positive work behavior and attitudes hence; it promotes cooperation and integrity in the workplace that reduces conflicts.

Compromising

Compromising is intermediate in both assertiveness and cooperativeness. The objective is to find some expedient, mutually acceptable solution which partially satisfies both parties. It falls on a middle ground between competing and accommodating. Compromising gives up more than competing but less than accommodating. Likewise, it addresses an issue more directly than avoiding, but does not explore it in as much depth as collaborating. Compromising might mean splitting the difference, exchanging concessions, or seeking a quick middle-ground position.

Compromising strategy is characterized with negotiation and a high degree of flexibility. Burnside (2008) stated that the adoption of compromising approach creates an atmosphere of win – lose outcome among the parties in conflict. This is so because it is expected that for parties in conflict to arrive at an agreeable resolution, each party must give up something such that there is no clear winner or loser. This therefore proves that under this platform no party achieves complete satisfaction of needs and goals but provides partial satisfaction accepted by the parties concerned. In this regard, Snell (2002) added that this strategy is neither highly cooperative nor highly assertive thus resulting in satisficing rather than maximizing solutions.

An effective conflict management strategy should: Minimize Affective Conflicts at Various Levels, Attain and Maintain a Moderate Amount of Substantive Conflict and Select and Use Appropriate Conflict Management Strategies

Minimize Affective Conflicts at Various Levels.

Affective conflict refers to inconsistency in interpersonal relationships, which occurs when organizational members become aware that their feelings and emotions regarding some of the issues are incompatible. "Summarily stated, relationship conflicts interfere with task-related effort because members focus on reducing threats, increasing power, and attempting to build cohesion rather than working on task . . . The conflict causes members to be negative, irritable, suspicious, and resentful" (Jehn, 1997).

Evidence indicates that affective conflict impedes group performance. It affects group performance by limiting information processing ability and cognitive functioning of group members and antagonistic attributions of group members' behavior. Affective conflict diminishes group loyalty, workgroup commitment, intent to stay in the present organization, and job satisfaction (Amason, 1996). These result from higher levels of stress and anxiety, and conflict escalation.

Attain and Maintain a Moderate Amount of Substantive Conflict

Substantive conflict occurs when two or more organizational members disagree on their task or content issues. Substantive conflict is very similar to issue conflict, which occurs when two or more social entities disagree on the recognition and

solution to a task problem. A study by Jehn (1995) suggests that a moderate level of substantive conflict is beneficial as it stimulates discussion and debate, which help groups to attain higher level of performance. "Groups with an absence of task conflict may miss new ways to enhance their performance, while very high levels of task conflict may interfere with task completion" (Jehn, 1997, p. 532). Evidence indicates that substantive conflict is positively associated with beneficial outcomes:

A. Groups that report substantive conflict are able to make better decisions than those that do not (Amason, 1996). Substantive conflict encourages greater understanding of the issues, which leads to better decisions. B. Groups that report substantive conflict generally have higher performance. This conflict can improve group performance through better understanding of various viewpoints and alternative solutions (Bourgeois, 1985; Eisenhardt & Schoonhoven, 1990; Jehn, 1995, 1997; Jehn et al., 1999). It should be noted that the beneficial effects of substantive conflict on performance were found only in groups performing nonroutine tasks, but not groups performing standardized or routine tasks. Although substantive conflict enhances group performance, like affective conflict, it can diminish group loyalty, workgroup commitment, intent to stay in the present organization, and job satisfaction (Jehn, 1997; Jehn et al., 1999). As a result, interventions for conflict management should be designed to develop cultural norms to support disagreement among group members in connection with tasks and other related management issues without generating affective conflict.

Select and Use Appropriate Conflict Management Strategies

There are various styles of conflict management strategies, such as integrating, obliging, dominating, avoiding, and compromising, which can be used to deal with conflict. Organizational members would require training and on-the-job experience to select and use the styles of handling interpersonal conflict so that various conflict situations can be appropriately dealt with. In general, managing conflict to enhance learning and effectiveness require the use of integrating or problem solving style (Rahim, 2001).

Organisational Performance

Organisational performance is ability to utilize its acquired scarce resources and valuables in the pursuit of its operational objectives and goals (Robbins, 2009). It is the single most vital determinant of the accomplishment of a business; the capability of an organisation to achieve organisational goals effectively and efficiently. Public sector establishments have their peculiarity; they are process or service-oriented and not result-oriented. As such, the measure of their organisational performance is the extent that they have achieved set goals, aims, and objectives; how much their outputs have effectively and efficiently contributed to policy objectives. It is imperative, to strategically and systematically measure their performance (Robbins, 2015). The Balanced Scorecard, developed by Kaplan and Norton, has been identified as the appropriate performance measurement method. The balanced scorecard (BSC) converts the organisation's mission and strategy into a comprehensive set of performance tools and creates a strategic measurement system. The balanced scorecard method unites the perspectives of these four perspectives, and other different groups of data of performance results so that the performance can be more comprehensively analysed and measured.

Conflict Management and Organizational Performance

Chandan (2005) expresses that where they not brought under control in good time, conflicts could work against the achievement of organizational goals. Individual and group responses in conflict situations could range from sabotage, slowing down the pace of work, over-load to lack of cooperation. More importantly, targets and objectives are achieved by groups and individuals and as such, more critical the conflict is to the core operations of the organization and the higher the position in hierarchy of persons in conflict situation, the more devastating the impact of such conflict situations. Precisely, because the goals of the organization are formulated by individuals, when the same individuals are in conflict situation some organizational goals either do not get achieved in good time or may be re-aligned or modified. Chandan (2005) observes that under conflict situation organizational performance is hampered. This is because as conflict rages on individual workers become more aggrieved, less committed to work, frustrated, unmotivated and less productive. These lead to levity, loss of time, low productivity and output. Ultimately, organizational performance is adversely

affected. McDaniel (2001) supports this by stating that the problems of organizational conflict is that if it not properly managed, it hampers productivity, lowers moral, causes more and continued conflict and breeds indiscipline and misconduct. These hamper productivity, profitability and performance of the organization. The bad consequences of organizational conflict makes it imperative for management to ensure that conflicts are promptly resolved as they occur.

Data Presentation

Research Question One: what are the causes of organizational Conflict in Rivers State ministry of justice?

Table 1: Contingency table showing causes of organizational Conflict in Rivers State ministry of justice

Descriptive Statistics

Items	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Communication gap	2.48	.835	100
Poor organizational structure	1.92	.734	100
Poor performance	3.05	.978	100
Non implementation of Government circular on staff welfare	3.19	1.032	100
Personality clashes / ego problem	1.91	.698	100
Differences in values	2.99	.904	100
Denials of right and privileges	3.13	.849	100
Issues of wages and salaries	3.22	.949	100
Unfavorable government policies	3.01	.810	100
Lack of cordial relationship between labor and government	3.32	.909	100
Inadequate provision of physical amenities such as electricity and water	3.50	.718	100

(Source, field study, 2024)

In table 1, eleven causes of organizational conflict were assessed to determine organizational conflict management strategies in Rivers State ministry of justice.

The mean scores of all the assessed variables ranged between 1.91 and 3.50. while the standard deviation range between 0.718 to 1.032.

Research Question Two: What are the effects of conflict on the organizational performance in Rivers State ministry of justice?

Table 2: Contingency table showing the effects of conflict on the organizational performance in Rivers State ministry of justice

Descriptive Statistics

Items	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Communication breakdown	2.33	1.120	100
Low morale	3.50	.810	100
Low quality	2.80	1.035	100
Low productivity	3.30	.847	100
Lack of direction	2.06	.930	100
Inability to achieve the goals and objectives	2.41	1.006	100
Loss of lives and property	2.01	.785	100
Insubordination	3.05	.989	100
Delay in promotion of staff	2.08	.787	100
Suspension or dismissal of staff	2.45	1.067	100

(Source, field study, 2024)

In table 2, ten effects of conflict on the organizational performance were assessed to determine how organizational conflict management strategies in Rivers State civil ministry of justice. The mean scores of all the assessed variables ranged between 2.01 and 3.50. Since all the mean scores were found to be above the criterion mean score of 2.00, it means that all the assessed items had effect on organisatinal performance in Rivers State ministry of justice

Discussion of Findings

The most common causes of conflict found in this study include communication gap, poor organizational structure, poor performance, non-implementation of government circular on staff welfare, personality clashes / ego problem,

differences in values, denials of right and privileges, issues of wages and salaries, unfavorable government policies, lack of cordial relationship between labor and management and inadequate provision of physical amenities such as electricity and water. This agreedwith the work of Alade (1998), who pointed out that effective communication channel was vital to an organisation and that the continuous healthy existence of any organisation depends on how well its communication channels operate. Other major causes of conflict were non implementation of government circular on staff welfare. Duties and roles of public servants should be well defined. Each officer should know his expected roles and his boundaries and limitations. This would reduce the frictions that often arise from misunderstanding of leadership roles, task performance and task expectations.

Individuals within an organization may possess distinct personality traits such as authoritarianism, dogmatism, aggressiveness, or distrust. These personality traits can contribute to conflicts, particularly when certain individuals are predisposed to oppose others on every issue. Conflicts may arise when employees with contrasting personality traits are required to work closely together or make joint decisions. Also, values influence individuals' way of doing things. When different values exist among staff, especially between professionals and bureaucratic staff, it can create tensions within the system. Within an organization, conflicts may arise when different staff values clash with the organization's mission or with each other. For instance, staff who are creativity, innovation, and autonomy might clash with staff who emphasize rules, regulations, and adherence to established procedures. These value conflicts can lead to disputes over how tasks are performed, the allocation of resources, or even the overall direction the organization should take. It can also result in a lack of commitment to common goals and a breakdown in cooperation, hindering the organization's ability to achieve its objectives effectively.

Conclusions

The civil service plays a crucial role in delivering essential services to citizens. However, the effective performance of organisation is hindered by various challenges, among which conflicts within the organisation stand out as significant impediments. This research has explored conflict management strategies

employed within the civil service and their effect on organizational performance. The study identified several causes of conflicts in the civil service.

From the findings the study concluded that the conflict management strategies are crucial for the attainment and achievement of organizational goals and objectives. In other words, if the management is not knowledgeable in conflict resolution strategies, it will affect the performance of organizations negatively but if conflict is constructively managed, it will enhance organizational performance. Since a good conflict improve decision outcomes and ensure group performance when properly managed, it is thus important for managers of organization to understand their organization and know the best strategy of conflict management to use so as to blend with the particular conflict situation.

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