CAUSES AND STRATEGIES FOR CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN AN ORGANIZATION: A CASE STUDY OF ROAD CONSTRUCTION WORKERS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The major aim of any organization is to function effectively to enable proper productive atmosphere. However, employing best strategist for proper management of an organization is necessary to foster good human relationship among workers and employees in an organization. Such better approaches or strategies include; collaboration among workers representatives, proper bargaining and fair power play among others. As the causes of this conflict was identified properly in this paper, such causes as poor management styles of leadership, late of payment of workers, salaries, inappropriate termination of workers appointment social awareness of workers individuals interest among other things. The paper recommends that employee of organization should properly build a good human relationship between their staff by having a mutual understanding between their workers representative and management representative. The paper further recommends that late payment of workers' salaries should be avoided by any organization to enable enough production. It also suggests that workers in construction firm should not be sacked from their jobs inappropriately.

Keywords: Conflicts, Conflict Management, Organization, Road Construction Workers, Nigeria.

Introduction

Conflict concerns people anywhere because as far as people or organizations exist, there must be a conflict but it all depends on how it is managed. If a conflict is well managed, it brings about positive result in an organization but if is poorly managed, it brings about poor outcome.

Conflict is defined as a clash between individuals arising out of a difference in thought process, attitudes, understanding, interest, requirements and even sometimes perception. A conflict usually results in heated arguments, physical abuses and finally loss of peace.

Madalina (2015) defines conflict as 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 member of another group. Conflicts result when there are the opposing ideas and action of different entities, thus resulting in an antagonistic state (Tschonnen-Moran, 2001). It is mainly believed of individual interest in an organization which differs among individuals or group of individuals.

Thatore (2013) in his work on conflict management sees conflict as to be in opposition to one another. He further refers it to disagreement between people or members of an organization. Such disagreement is inherent in relationships between all human beings. Larfela (1988) concurs with this view when he defines conflict as, "part of the competition process that is basic to the survival and successful evolution of the species, homosapiens and to this search for new and better ways to cope with limited resources and stress from environmental change".

According to this definition it is obvious that conflict always exist between people, groups of people, members of an organization and between organization which are related in one way or another,

Appelbaum, Abdullah and Shapiro (1999), defined conflicts as a process of social interaction; it involves a struggle over claims to resources, power and status beliefs, preferences and desire. This means that organization cannot exist without conflict as organization involves different individuals with individual's differences. Darling and walker (2001), like this idea to the organization by stating that even when conflict is natural the phenomenon in social relations, it can nevertheless be easily managed within companies.

Conflicts can be divided into four major types. They are, interpersonal conflict, which is refers to a conflict between two individuals. This type of conflict occurs usually due to how individuals are different from one another, intrapersonal conflict; this usually occur within an individual. The experience of this takes place in the individuals mind. However, this type of conflict is psychologically involving the person's thoughts, values, principals and emotions. Intra-group conflict; this type of conflict occurs among individuals within a team. The misunderstandings and incompatibility among these group of individuals lead to an intra-group conflict and Inter-group conflict which takes place when a misunderstanding arises among different teams within an organization. Competition also contributes to the increase in intergroup conflicts. Other factors which fuel this type of conflict includes, a rivalry in resources or the boundaries set by a group to others which established their own identity as a team (Denohue and Kott. 1992). In addition to this category of conflict type, (Jehn and Mannix 2001) have proposed the division of conflicts into three types of relationships, task and processor relationship, conflict stems from interpersonal incompatibilities, task conflict is related to disagreement of viewpoint and opinion about a particular task, and process conflict refers to disagreement over the groups approval, to the task, its methods, and the group

process. However, the relationship conflict and process conflict are harmful. Task conflict is found to be beneficial since it encourages diversity of opinions, care should be taken so that it does not develop into process or relationship conflict (Denohue and Kott, 1992).

Theories of conflict
Conflict has been a transition in the way it has been viewed by scholars. They are:
- Human relation school view of conflicts: This theory believes that conflict is available by creating an environment of goodwill and trust management has always, been concerned with avoiding conflict if possible and resolving it soon it occurs.
- Traditional school view of conflicts: This theory view conflicts as bad for an organization because it is disruptive, unnatural and represents a form of deviant behaviour which, should be controlled and changed if the objectives of the organization is to be achieved. This group of thoughts believes that conflict situation can have tragic consequence for some people and advert effect on organizational performance.
- Integrationist school view of conflict: This is the most recent perspective and explicitly argues that some conflicts should not only be seen as good or bad but rather that some conflict is absolutely necessary for a group to perform effectively (DC Dreu & Van de Vliert, 1997) and formally.
- Inter actionist school of view of conflict. This group of philosopher believes that conflict is a positive force and necessary for effective performance. This approach encourages a minimum level of conflict within the group in order to encourage self-criticism, change and innovation and to help prevent apathy or to greet a tolerance for harmony and the status quo conflict as part of life is an of life is an inventible feature of organizational life and should be judged by its on performance.

According to Shetah (2012), conflict is part of social and business life hence, it is found everywhere. Conflict can be seen as a reality of social life that exists at all levels of the society, it can be said to be as old as human race. Due to the immense social interaction that takes place in an organization, conflict is unavoidable. However its result can be positive or negative. Scholars asserted that many types of relationship such as families, churches, marriages, nations, ethnic groups, and organizations experience conflicts (Deutsch, Coleman & Marcus (2006, Afful-Brom, 2012).

Organizational conflicts usually crops up when there is disagreement on how a job or task should be executed, this could be disagreement between individual, inter-personal or intergroup; How this conflict is managed will determine its outcome or result. According to Riaz and Junaid (2011), ineffective managed organizational conflict leads to reduced confidence levels, stress, and frustration as well as produces anxiety which could cause humiliation, disengagement. It also goes a long way to produce more conflict and destructively effects to the entire organization. Effective conflict management promotes organizational development through employee dedication, enthusiasm, absorption. It also boosts morals and stimulates individuals which will in turn lead to organizational effectiveness.

According to Odoh as cited in Nnam (2013), conflict management is a means of curtailing apprehension and negative influence of conflicts through the application of several measures designed to create awareness as well promote an understanding of the conflict situation by various parties involved. Dewa, Corbicre, Durand and Hensel (2012), sees management of conflicts as a pertinent topic for every business owner, stakeholders, etc because mismanaged conflict can have negative outcomes to an organizational effectiveness.

Yusuf-Habeeb and Kazeem (2017) made a study appraisal of conflict management as a tool for achieving industrial harmony. The focus of this study was to determine ways of sustaining harmonious industrial relationship in future thereby avoiding disruptive conflicts. A total of 300 respondents were used for the study. The finding showed that poor conflict management has a devastating effect on industrial organization harmony of Etisalat Nigeria. It also showed that conflict is also associated with Performance standard targets. Hence, it was recommended that management should improve communication with staff to address issues that can create conflicts before they crop up, that the standard set by management be specific, measurable, realistic, achievable and should have limit; management should disseminate information or give orders clearly by formally instructing employees on the use of written guidelines such as circular, memo etc., there should be a process to bridge communication gap between management and staff for clear understanding and accurate interpretation of all information which will in turn lead to industrial harmony.

Majowa's (2015) research on industrial conflict and its management strategies in selected manufacturing companies in Lagos state Nigeria is yet another work. This study employed co-relational survey method which involves the use of structured questionnaire and personal observation to extract information from the respondents. The respondents were draw from employees of three manufacturing companies in Lagos, Nigeria.

Multistage sampling techniques was employed in selecting the respondent from the three manufacturing companies under the study which includes respondents from the three manufacturing companies under the study which includes Glaxos multichiwe Nigeria, PZ industries PLC and Nestle Nig PLC. The data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics including table, frequency counts, and percentage as well as mean scores. The findings exposed the causes of conflict in manufacturing companies in Lagos state Nigeria to include poor employee compensation, unfavorable economic and organizational politics, poor means of communication grievances to echelon managers and poor welfare and others. The study recommended the use of combine strategies such as collaboration, bargaining and avoidance in managing organizational conflict to enhance productive employee to management relationships.

Obasan (2011), in his study on impact of conflict management on corporate productivity, acknowledged poor human relations between management and personal, unacceptable conditions of employment, failure to consult with workers before taking important decisions on issues that concerns them, lack of strategies to prevent conflict and management opposition to unions disposition as major factors to organizational conflict.

Causes of Conflict in an Organisation

There are numerous possible factors that can lead to organizational conflicts. Some scholars like itemized these causes as non-payment or late payment of wages and salaries, management style, condition of employment, social awareness of employees, inappropriate termination of appointment, motivational and promotional factors, dispute and grievance, violation of collective agreement, interdependence, management opposition to union disposition, variation in goals or objectives. Obasan (2011), acknowledge that causes of conflict in an organization include group members having diverse perception towards one another, bringing different values to their work, insufficient resources, diversity in attitude that leads to different goals, variation in perspective leading to different clarification of the same information, frustration based on inability to achieve set out goals, etc.

Strategies for Perfect Conflict Management

It is advised that the following actions should be observed to limit conflicts in an organization.

- Intervene: the management of an organization should ensure that all group members are aware of that you as a group manager dealing with the situation. The main aim is to restore order and thereby ensure a safe working environment.
- Take charge of the situation this refers to separation of conflicting parties. Remove any person engaged in unacceptable behaviour. It is also advisable to use external support i.e. from the department director etc, if there is the threat of verbal or physical danger.
- Discuss and resolve the problem after a decent cooling off/calming down period, follow the steps of dispute /conflict resolution mentioned above if possible. If necessary, use other external support, such as the Psychological advisor, the HR specialist or even the chaplain.
- Debrief and preview, prevention is better than cure. It is important we acknowledge the condition as occurred and resolved to all parties involved directly or indirectly, within the organization finally, set up a full agenda and follow it up.

However, a conflict is resolved if the experienced causes for the conflict are removed. This means that it is not enough to only cease conflictual action to resolve a conflict. The conflictual parties should also feel that there are no more grounds for more conflicts. So, resolving conflicts often involves changing attitudes of revenge and hatred by excusing and forgiving the other party. The timely identification of nature and significance of sources of conflicts in an organization is the major step in developing conflict management strategies (Elmagri & Eaton, 2011). The best technique in conflicts management in an organization is to focus on strategies that will enhance constructive function to optimize organizational effectiveness, therefore, it is pertinent to identify all levels of conflict in an organization be it individual, interpersonal or intergroup conflict. Uchendu, Anijaobi and Odigwe (2013), argued that since conflict is avoidable in an organizations, its management determines whether it will produce positive or negative effect on the organizational effectiveness. This means that proper identification and immediate clarification of any tension in an organization before it escalate translate to a better management of organizational conflict management.

However, this paper tries to find out how our organization are been affected by conflict.

Methodology

This work was carried out in a road construction company. The company it made up of five department namely, store department, civil Engineering department, mechanical engineering depart, Accounting department and security department. However a sample of 100 workers was drawn from each of the five departments giving a total number of 500 workers. A questionnaire that is personally designed was used to get information from the workers on the factors which cause conflict in an factors which causes conflict in an organization. The questionnaire used four (4) point likert format namely, strong, Agreed; SA, Agreed A, Disagree; A and strongly Disagreed, SD, which were rated 4,3,2, and 1 respectively mean of 2.5 and above was interpreted to be agreed while the mean of below 2.5 was taken as disagree.

Tables 1: factors which cause conflict in an organization

FACTORS	FREQUENCY OF RESPONSES		MEAN	DECISION RULE
	Agree	Disagree		
Management Styles	450 (90%)	50	3.60	Agreed
late payment of Salaries	450 (90%)	-	3.60	Agreed
Inappropriate termination of workers appointment	450 (90%)	-	3.60	Agreed
Social awareness of works	450 (90%)	-	3.60	Agreed
Individual interest	450 (90%)	-	3.60	Agreed

From the above table, it can be seen that many of the respondents agreed of that the following factors cause conflict in an organization.

Table 2: Approaches/Strategies for managing conflict in an organization

FACTORS	FREQUENCY OF RESPONSES		MEAN	DECISION RULE
	Agree	Disagree		
Strategies	450 (90%)	50	3.60	Agreed
Collaboration	450 (90%)	-	3.60	Agreed
Bargaining	450 (90%)	-	3.60	Agreed
Power play	450 (90%)	-	3.60	Agreed

From the above table it shows that respondents believe that the following are best straitening for managing conflict in an organization.

Discussion

From the above results, it shows that all the respondents (workers) in the road construction company believes that the following factors causes conflict in organization; such factors as management style in organization, late payment of workers' salaries, in appropriate terminations of workers' salaries and social welfare of workers, etc. Within table 2, the respondents also agreed on the strategies which helps in management of conflicts in an organization, such strategies as collaboration bargain and power play. This according Derr

(1975), in his contingency theory is believed that these three major conflict management approaches from which intervener can draw to formulate an approach appropriate for resolving disputes in an organization.

Conclusion

From the finding of this work it can be concluded that road construction workers in Nigeria are familiar with the causes of conflict in an organization and also the ways conflicts have been managed appropriately for effective production.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In the view of the findings of the paper, the writers suggest the following recommendations:
- Employers of labour should adopt fair play in managing their workers.
- Salaries of workers should be paid on time.
- Workers in construction firm should not be sacked inappropriately.
- Trust should be built between employee representatives and management.

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