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STRATEGIES FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES: 1999 AND 2000 UNIVERSITY OF ILORIN CRISES

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ABSTRACT

The Chinese philosopher Sun Tzu wrote in the art of War many years ago about how to manage a war. He opined that:

- (i) When the enemy advances we retreat*
- (ii) When the enemy halts, we harass!*
- (iii) When the enemy seeks to avoid battle, we attack*
- (iv) When the enemy retreat, we pursue*

Although these rules were meant to guide military strategy, it has very good application in conflict management. Organization conflict arises as a result of lack of synchronization of goals and interests of the employees and the employers. The conflict of interests between Academic Staff Union of Nigeria Universities, (ASUU), University of Ilorin Chapter and the management generated much controversy within the last few years in the National dailies. This article is aimed at providing strategies for conflict resolution that will bring harmony into the University community. The period covered by this paper is between 1999 and year 2002. The methods of data collection were both primary and secondary. This paper argued that when there is "perceived enemy", the best option should be to retreat to safeguard against incalculable loss. One Hundred questionnaires were administered to the Lecturers from the two campuses of University of Ilorin. The method of data analysis used was Chi-Square. This paper argued that industrial harmony is possible when all the parties at the negotiation table are not too rigid on their position.

INTRODUCTION

Organization climate influences the level of morals and attitudes which members of the organization bring to bear on their work performance and personal relationships. Organizational conflict on the other hand as a way of making the organizational climate cloudy if it is not properly handled. Such conflicts can constitute a barrier to the attainment and achievement of the organizational goals.

Healthy organizational climate is expected to generate complete harmony in working relationships loyalty and common commitment to the goals and objectives of the organization.

Drucker (1998) says any business enterprise must build a true team and weld individual efforts into a common effort. Each member of the enterprise contributes something different but they must all contribute towards a common goal. Their efforts must all pull in the same direction, and their contribution must fit together to produce a whole without gaps, without friction, without unnecessary duplication of effort. The manager must know and understand what the business goals demand of him in terms of performance, and his superior must know what contribution to demand or expect of him and must judge him accordingly. If these requirements are not met, managers are misdirected. Their efforts are wasted. Instead of teamwork, there is friction, frustration and conflict.

The view of Drucker is regarded as the traditional or unitary perspective in which the organization is viewed as an integrated and harmonious whole. Hence, conflict is seen as the dysfunction outcome of work agitators, poor communication, and personality clashes. But the pluralistic sees conflict among competing sub-groups as inevitable because of the structure of the organization.

This pluralistic perspective is radical and is associated with the ideas of Karl Marx. It challenges the traditional view of conflict and sees organizations in terms of the disparity in power and control. Conflict is therefore seen as a feature of the unequal nature of organization life and a means of bringing about change. Collective bargaining is not seen as particular helpful in a system that is against the workers. Rather conflict is considered a natural part of the class struggle.

It must be pointed out that, the University of Ilorin management between 1999 and 2002 adopted the traditional perspective while the ASUU Unilorin Chapter on the other hand embraced the radical approach, the consequence was a fall-out which was not in line with the Sun Tzu dictum.

The social cost of conflict is so enormous that a serious manager will do all within his capacity to discover the best strategy for conflict resolution. In the case of tertiary education, unsettled conflict has serious implication on the number of years the students will spend in the Universities as well as financial commitment of their parents. It also has implication on the image of the Universities abroad as well as the victim of retrenchment exercise accompanying the face-off between the labour Union and the employer. This paper believes that compromise is very essential to smooth functioning of the organization.

OBJECTIVES

The major objectives of this paper are to examine the remote and immediate causes of industrial disharmony in University of Ilorin between 1999 and 2002. Secondly, the paper is aimed at providing strategies for conflict management in Nigeria Universities in the nearest future and how industrial harmony can be achieved within the system

LITERATURE REVIEW

Organizational conflict is defined as the behaviour intended to obstruct the achievement of some other person's goals. Conflict is therefore a product of incompatibility of goals and it arises from opposing behaviours. It can be viewed from the individual group or organization levels.

Mullins (1999) identified three potential sources of organization conflict. They are:-

- (i) Individual – such as attitude, personality characteristics of particular person, needs, illness and stress.
- (ii) Group – such as group skills, the informal organization and group norms.
- (iii) Organization - such as communications, authority structure, leadership style and management behaviour.

We need to know that individual sources of conflict often develop into groups as well as organizational conflict. From the potential sources highlighted above the nature of the union leader will determine to a large extent the achievement of the union's demand.

The management styles employed by the organization would then determine whether the conflict will be subdued or aggravated for example. An autocratic Manager or leader will use coercion rather than persuasion to achieve his own goals. If the calibre of the ideologues of Karl Marx who believed in radicalism are the Union Leaders, then the organization runs a risk of heading for precipice.

Boyans and Cronin (1983) also identified six possible areas of conflict within the organization:

- (a) Difference between corporate and individual goal
- (b) Conflict between different departments or group within the organization
- (c) Conflict between the formal and informal organization

- (d) Conflict between manager and the managed
- (e) Conflict between individual and job
- (f) Conflict between individuals.

From these possible sources of conflict we discovered that, lack of synchronization of individual goals within the organizational goals may make an individual to work contrary to the corporate goals of the organization. There is also departmental conflict, which can inhibit the attainment of the organizational goals a department requires. Organizations that disregard the existence of informal group run the risk of being run aground. A union may also take up complaints of individual members of the union as it relates to job content. Where the union feels that the union member concerned is being over- employed the union may take up the case on behalf of the employee in question and the refusal of the organization to bow to the threat of the union may generate conflict of a higher magnitude. The fractionalization of ASSU, Ilorin chapter prior to the coming on boards of the management of University of Ilorin during the period covered was responsible for the edge that the management had over ASUU. The management employed the Lugardian formula of "divided and rule".

The result was a further division in the Union. The confrontational attitude of the local ASUU was not favoured by all the members which made some members to back- out from the struggle. There are different school of thought on conflict:

1. **THE PERSONALITY THEORY SCHOOL**

Rosenman and Friedman (1983) are the Vanguards of the school. They divided people into Type – A and Type – B personalities. The work of Rosenman and Friedman are concerned with susceptibility of heart disease but if we look at the characteristics of each Type, we see that their reaction to conflict situation vary significantly. They listed the characteristics of Type- A personality and Type – B as below:

CHARACTERISTIC OF TYPE-A PERSONALITY

- (i) actively seeks promotion at work or advancement socially
- (ii) is highly competitive
- (iii) has a strong often domineering personalities
- (iv) desire public recognition for his or her efforts
- (v) loses his or her temper easily

- (vi) becomes restless when compelled to be inactive
- (vii) does everything quickly – speaking, walking, moving, eating etc
- (viii) loves to have several jobs on the go at once
- (ix) is very conscious of time- thrives on deadlines
- (x) grows impatient with others who are not as quick as him or herself
- (xi) is always punctual

CHARACTERISTIC OF TYPE- B PERSONALITY

- (i) tackles tasks slowly and methodically
- (ii) is rarely competitive whether working or playing
- (iii) likes to do a job well but does not desire public recognition
- (iv) speaks quite slowly and has an easy-going manner
- (v) is not particularly ambitious
- (vi) does not lose his or her temper easily
- (vii) prefers to tackle one task at a time
- (viii) enjoys periods of idleness
- (ix) moves unhurriedly
- (x) is not time conscious- may miss deadlines or arrive late.

From the personality- theory school, very few people fit exactly into the category but most are predominantly Types A or Type B. A look at the characteristics listed suggest that without effective management it will be quite easy for conflict to arise.

An organization that has at the helm of affairs a Type – A manager may not be people conscious but production conscious. Although on the surface, the Type – A person appears to be very difficult to deal with but they are needed in every organization if the organizational goals will be achieved. A Type – A personality can be an effective team manager if he can be given right amount of responsibility but urged to mellow down the impatience when others may not act or react as quickly as they do.

2. THE FUNCTIONALIST SCHOOL

The functionalist school was championed by Lewis Coser. He suggested that internal conflict has a range of salutary consequences such as stabilizing group relations by bringing simmering grievances to a manageable level. Lewis' school believed that conflict had a positive function to the organization and provides a central explanation for the analysis of social change and progress.

3. **THE TRADITIONAL SCHOOL**

This school views conflicts as bad for organizations 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. To the traditional school, conflict situations can have a tragic consequences for some people and adverse effect on organizational performance.

4. **THE INTERACTIONIST SCHOOL**

Townsend (1985) sees conflict as a sign of a healthy organization up to a point. A good manager according to him, does not try to eliminate conflict, he tries to keep it from wasting the energies of his people... if you are the boss and your people fight you openly when they think you are wrong, that's healthy. If your people fight each other openly in your presence for what they believed in – that's healthy. But keep all the conflict eyeball to eyeball.

Robins (1998) 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 too great a tolerance for harmony and the status quo. Conflicts is an inevitable features of organizational life and should be judged by its on performance

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study used a combination of questionnaire and interview methods to gather relevant information on the study. One hundred questionnaires were administered and 70 of the respondents returned their filled questionnaires. Respondents were stratified into male and female and data analyses were both descriptive

and inferential. Simple percentage average and Chi- Square distributions were employed in the analysis. The questionnaires were administered to Lecturers of the University of Ilorin in various departments.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of the study are discussed here under. Since the study seeks strategies for conflict management in Nigerian Universities, the findings are classified under tables as below.

Table 1.0 Gender Distribution of respondents

Respondents	No Distributed	No Returned	Percentage Returned
Male lecturers	70	50	50
Female lecturer	30	20	20
Total	100	70	70

Table 1.0 above contains data reporting the numbers and percentages of questionnaires administered to Lecturers. The data were obtained from randomly selected Lecturers who were members of ASUU. The percentage of questionnaires duly completed and returned stands at 70%, 50% of which were male respondents and 20% female respondents.

Table 2.0

DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS ON REASONS FOR CONFLICT BETWEEN ASUU AND ADMINISTRATION

Reasons	Frequency	Percentage
A. Inadequate funding	20	28.6
B. Municipal services deterioration	5	7.1
C. Inadequate staffing	3	4.3

D. Non- functioning facilities	2	2.8
E. Inadequate office accommodation	2	2.8
F. Increment in salaries	10	14.2
G. Outstanding due payment	2	2.8
H. Promotion	4	5.7
I. Recruitment procedure	5	7.1
J. Deduction of service charges	4	5.7
K. Union check- off Due	10	14.2
L. Retrenchment	4	5.7
TOTAL	70	100.00

Many of the respondent (28.6%) argued that the inadequate funding of the University education by the Federal Government is responsible for the inelegant face off between ASUU and Union check- off due rank next as the basis for conflict between ASUU and University management.

Table 3.0

DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS ON PROCEDURE FOR RESOLVING INDUSTRIAL CONFLICTS IN UNILORIN

Conflict Resolution Techniques	Frequency	Percentage
Grievance procedure	6	8.57
Negotiation	20	28.57
Collective Bargaining	13	18.57
Confrontation	31	44.28
Total	70	100.00

From the data presented in table 3.0 some of the respondents 31 (44.28%) claimed that ASUU was too confrontational in her approach to press her demands with the administration 18.57% of the respondents wished that collective bargaining technique were used for the resolution of the conflict.

HYPOTHESIS TESTING

The only hypothesis tested in this paper is to find out whether organizational conflict significantly affects the achievement of organizational goals

Test H_0 : organizational conflict does not affect the achievement of organizational

goals

H_1 ; organizational conflict affect the achievement of organizational goals at 5% significance level.

The respondents results in table 4 below is used to test the hypothesis above.

Table 4.0 DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS ACCORDING TO STATUS ON EFFECT OF ORGANIZATIONAL CONFLICT ON GOALS ACHIEVEMENT

STATUS	SA	A	D	SD	Total
Professors	2	0	1	0	3
Readers	0	2	0	0	2
S. Lecturers	8	2	3	2	15
Lecturer I	3	4	2	1	10
Lecturer II	9	3	2	6	20
Asst. Lecturer	12	2	4	2	20
Total	34	13	12	11	70

Note: SA= strongly agreed; A= Agreed; D= Disagree; SD= Strongly Disagreed

Table 4 is the observed values of the respondents of the Lecturers, to obtain the expected values we simply used the formular, $f_e = \frac{\text{Row total} \times \text{column total}}{\text{Grand total}}$

The table below compares the observed frequency of the respondents and expected frequency as it affect goals achievement.

f_o	f_e	$f_o - f_e$	$(f_o - f_e)^2$	$(f_o - f_e)^2 / f_e$
2	1.45	0.55	0.3025	0.2086
0	0.5	-0.5	0.25	0.5
1	0.51	0.49	0.2401	0.4707

0	0.47	0.47	0.2209	0.47
0	0.97	0.97	0.9409	0.97
2	0.37	1.63	2.6569	7.11808
0	0.51	-0.51	0.2601	0.51
0	0.31	-0.31	0.0961	0.31
8	7.3	0.7	0.49	0.0671
2	2.78	-0.78	0.6084	0.2188
3	2.57	0.43	0.1849	0.0719
2	2.36	-0.36	0.1296	0.0549
3	4.85	-1.85	3.4225	0.7056
4	1.85	2.15	4.6225	2.4986
2	1.71	0.29	0.0841	0.0491
1	1.57	-0.57	0.3249	0.2069
9	9.71	-0.71	0.5041	0.0519
3	3.71	-0.71	0.5441	0.1358
2	3.42	-1.42	2.0164	0.5895
6	3.14	2.86	8.1796	2.6049
12	9.71	2.29	5.2441	0.5400
2	3.71	-1.71	2.9241	0.7881
4	3.42	0.58	0.3364	0.0988
2	3.14	-1.14	1.2996	0.4138
			$X^2_c =$	19.715

The X^2 calculated is 19.715 and therefore by comparing it with X^2 – tabulated at 5% significance and at $(r-1)(c-1)$ degree of freedom is $(6-1)(4-1)= 15$ degree of freedom.

Hence at 5% level of significance and at 15 degree of freedom, $X^2_t=7.261$ since X^2 calculated is greater than X^2_t tabulated we accept the alternative hypothesis that organizational conflict affect goals achievement.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The findings of this article can be summarized as follows:

- (1) There are more male staff than female in University of Ilorin and more

married staff than single, therefore caution is being exercised by the bread winners in the pursuit of their entitlements and demand

- (2) Those at the top echelon of the academic career seems to favour ASUU'S position than their junior colleagues.
- (3) Inadequate funding appears to be a domineering factor for organizational conflict in University of Ilorin.
- (4) High handedness of administration can lead to labour turnover, as the atmosphere becomes cloudy for any serious academic engagements.
- (5) Conflict resolution technique is dependent on the personality trait of the union leader. Leaders that are Type A trends to be confrontational while leaders that are Type- B believed in collective bargaining.
- (6) Dismissal is the last weapon that the employer has to quell organization conflict and should not be used anyhow.
- (7) Division among members of union without true reconciliation tends to weaken the union solidarity.

RECOMMENDATION

David Thompson, a renowned European historian succinctly paints a picture of war that: once began, it ran its course of insatiable demand for human sacrifice, discipline, organization and ingenuity, until it becomes almost an end in itself. We recommend the following strategies for future conflict resolution in Nigerian Universities.

- (1) In the events of any organizational conflict the personalities involved in union activities should not be attacked
- (2) The management should give room for bargaining rather than using coercion such as sign- back register. This is because most of the people that signed back did not do their work with the utmost commitment required. They were operating under duress.
- (3) There is the need for proper communication among union members so that appropriate decision would be taken
- (4) Trade unionism should not be banned or prohibited
- (5) Rigidity should be eliminated during negotiation. A give and take approach will promote industrial peace.
- (6) On rare occasion should external arbitration panel be brought to the negotiation table. (Domestic problems) should not be externalized
- (7) The employers and the employees should agree and disagree to agree

since they will still work together.

CONCLUSION

The employers seem to bear brunt of organizational conflict more than the employees in absolute terms. This is why employers may use their dismissal power to lay off workers. This paper concludes that the consideration of the interest of all parties involved will defrays consequent calamities of trade dispute.

INTRODUCTION

Management is the process of planning, organizing, leading, and controlling the activities of an organization to achieve its purpose. It is a dynamic process that involves the use of resources to create and deliver value to stakeholders. In modern organizations, the role of management is to ensure that the organization is able to effectively deploy its resources to achieve its purpose. To a large extent, therefore, the fundamental issue has been on how to handle greater differences in organizations. Conflict refers to the actual differences between two or more individuals or groups which are based on different interests, values, or needs. Conflict is a natural part of human interaction and is often inevitable in organizations. It can be either destructive or constructive, depending on how it is managed. Constructive conflict can lead to innovation and improvement, while destructive conflict can lead to division and inefficiency. Therefore, it is important for organizations to have effective conflict management strategies in place to ensure that conflicts are handled in a fair and equitable manner.

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