Conflict management strategies and performance of health institutions in Calabar Metropolis, Cross River State

Egong Mathew Mike[1], Usoroh, Beauty Kenneth[2]

[1]Department of Sociology, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Calabar, mathewobeten@gmail.com
[2]Department of Sociology, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Calabar, beautyusorohken@gmail.com

Abstract

The study examined conflict management strategies and performance of Health Institutions in Calabar Metropolis of Cross River State. The specific objectives were: to examine the impact of cognitive strategy on performance of Health Institutions and to determine the impact of behavioural strategy on performance of Health Institutions. Survey research design and primary sources of data were employed in the study. The study employed Person product moment correlation to analyse the data. The analysis revealed that cognitive strategy had a positive impact on performance of Health Institutions. Also, revealed that behavioural strategy had a positive impact on performance of Health Institutions. Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made: Health Institutions must accept the needs to influence the developmental dynamics of a conflict, so that the parties' attitudes and actions will lead to better coordination and a more appropriate interdependence. Also, Health Institutions should apply the situational approach to conflict management because methods of conflict management which is appropriate in one case may not necessarily be appropriate when applied to a conflict generated from another source.

Keywords: Conflict management strategies, cognitive strategy, behavioural strategy, performance, Health Institutions.

Introduction

Conflict 'is inevitable to any business organization or institution. Conflict may be perilous as well as being advantageous to organizations, institutions or states. It all depends on the way and means the organization, institutions or state can play a conflict situation to its advantage or disadvantage. It can destroy organization, institution or state, if it is not properly prevented or managed. Conflict situations appear with frequency in daily, public and private life. These conflicts may be on a small or large scale; they may occur within and among groups, communities of nations and they be triggered by ethnic, racial, religious or economic difference, in value, belief, and attitudes regarding issues etc.' (Assael, 2019).

Conflict management 'is the use of techniques to resolve disagreements or control the level of discord. Conflict resolution techniques include facilitating meetings for the conflicting parties to identify the problem, discuss resolutions and create subordinate goals that require cooperation from conflicting parties. Organizations are living systems consisting of interacting units arming a task in a mutually dependent manner within a structure of scarce resources. It seems commonplace to suggest that conflicts would present in such a setting. The parties in an organization may have a conflict about the distribution of resources, or they may have a more fundamental conflict about the very structure of their organization and the basic nature of their interaction' (Blade, 2014).

Once 'the parties are in a situation of goal incompatibility, their conflict develops in a dynamic fashion, initiating valuable and much needed constructive changes or leading to escalating strategies and destructive consequences. Asses that there is nothing pre-determined about its course or seems erroneous to view conflict from a negative perspective only - as destructive or dysfunctional. It is true that conflict may be uncomfortable, it may even be a source of problems, but it is absolutely necessary if change is to occur, if organizations are to survive and adapt. Conflict is therefore a functional variable' (Campbell, 2012).

In most of the organizations in Nigeria, 'the biggest problem of enterprises in developing the institution of conflict control is that of catching conflict young. This conflict is endemic to all social life and the situation is frequently allowed to develop to almost

unmanageable proportions before anything is done about them by which time it is often too late to resolve them by peaceful and procedural means. Research into conflict management in organization is categorize into normative and descriptive. Normative research is concerned with how things should be, whereas descriptive research addresses itself to what it is rather than what could or should be. This dual perspective is most apparent in approaches to the issues of conflict management in organizations. Normative approach reflects attitudes and beliefs which identify all conflict as destructive and promote conflict elimination as the formula for organizational success. Descriptive approaches accept conflict as inevitable and consider its proper management the primary responsibility of all administrators. This work is tilted to the descriptive mode of inquiry in presenting a framework for the study of conflict in organizations. But it goes beyond this domain in suggesting that administrators must take the offensive and seek to manage conflict, and also in advocating that traditional methods of dealing with conflict be replaced by a new and more sophisticated approach' (Campbell, 2012).

Objective of the study

The objective of the study was to examine the impact of conflict management strategies on performance of Health Institutions. The specific objectives were:

1. To examine the relationship between cognitive strategy (learning) and performance of health Institutions.
2. To determine the relationship between behavioral strategy (collaborating) on performance of health Institutions.

Theoretical framework

Structural functional system theory

This theory 'provides information to an organization in a time of crisis is critical to effective management? Who is the prophet it is not connected the work Structural-functional system theory addresses the intricacies of information networks and levels of command making up organizational communication. Corwin (2019) posited that, the structural-functional theory identifies information flow in organizations as "networks" made up of members and links. Information in organizations flow in patterns called networks' (Corwin, 2019).

Concept of conflict management

Conflict is a process on which one party perceives that its interest is being opposed or negatively affected by another party. It comprises cognitive and behavioural strategies. Cognitive Strategies often called defence mechanism, help an individual to falsify, distort or deny a particular conflict. Cognitive strategies represent an attempt to control or manage negative and disturbing feelings associated with conflict and to allow an individual to carry on with his normal activities. Cognitive strategies include repression (an attempt to push conflict out of existence) rationalization (hiding the truth from oneself), fantasy or even denial of reality. On the other hand behavioural Strategies for coping with interpersonal conflict include escape, withdrawal and aggression (especially against convenient targets)' (Deutshch, 2013; Dudley, 2012). 'Personality clash, power tussles, crisis or division within a given group, disagreement on group's position on an issue, realization of one's personal ambition, group leaders reneging on agreed issues of the group probably on power sharing formula are factors for conflict' (Nkpoyen, Kenneth & Akpama, 2020). Conflict is a channel through which creative solutions to human problems are defined and collective solutions identified and developed (Kenneth, Uwem & Egong, 2024).

These strategies cannot resolve interpersonal conflict in any permanent way. They can be successful in the short-run. They can help an individual to reduce his level of anxiety and diminish his tension. They can prevent or avoid disruptive behaviour' but then cannot generate

a solution. This can come about through the involvement of an expert consultant, acting in an accepting manner (Galung, 2019). Using the term in a abroad sense, conflict refers to all kinds of antagonistic interactions. More specifically it can be defined in which two or more parties have incompatible objectives and in which their perception and behaviour are commensurate with that incompatibility (Fink, 2018). This 'definition is purposely broad. It suggests that conflict is a social phenomenon that is found in personal, group or organizational interaction. As such it comprises several dimensions'. Fink (2018) 'distinguishes between (1) antagonistic - honour, whereas Litterer (2016) observes that conflict is made up of (1) antecedent conditions (2) affective condition (3) cognitive conditions and (4) behavioural conditions'. Kochan (2012) 'advances a conception of conflict which emphasizes its three, interrelated dimensions, namely (1) conflict situation (the basic in compatibility), (2) conflict attitudes (range of psychological factors) and (3) conflict behaviour' (; Mitchell, 2011; Mack, 2015).

According to Thomas (2016), 'Since recurrent armed conflict are frequently the product of enduring rivalries between pairs of hostile states, addressing and resolving animosities and problems in particular relationships is clearly a way to avert violent conflicts'. 'Prussian war theorist Carl von Clausewitz wrote in his 1832 treatise. On War that war is an instrument of policy, and that a nation's aim is to impose this policy on another nation or group of nations. This dearly realist theory can be applied to corporate boardrooms as well. Conflict is an instrument by which decision markers impose their will on other team members. Clearly, this theory is based on a realist's zero-sum game. Using Clausewitz's theory, one team member's ideas must win" and other team member's ideas must "lose" in order to resolve conflict' (Assail, 2000).

Western conflict resolution explores the ideas of achieving mutually beneficial terms to resolve a dispute through cooperation. This means that each team member must hear and understand the position of each other team member not only from their own perspective, but the other team members as well. If emotional conflict emerges, members may try to impose their will on others. Team members who are embroiled in emotional conflict will feel as though they are yielding ground if other team members overrule their suggestions. Likewise, if a team member is less concerned about their ideas and goals and others, that team member will avoid conflict because the costs outweigh the benefits. In between these two extremes is cognitive and constructive conflict, where team members balance the ideas, goal and concerns of all team members in reaching a negotiated resolution (Pondy, 2017).

International arena, both realists who subscribe to Clausewitz's war theories and liberals would agree that cooperation between states results in mutual benefit. However, realists and liberals disagree on the situations where multilateral cooperation is beneficial. Realists point to empirical results that show cooperation is only useful when setting limited standards, such as in telecommunications with various networking international shipping with the INCOTERMS conventions. These results show that when multilateral actions, such as economic sanctions, fail, their failures are due to enforcement (i.e. conflict resolution) problems and not bargaining or conflict management issues (Ikeagwu, 2018).

The ultimate, albeit rarely attainable, conflict resolution is one where all team members achieve their goals and where the conflict has been permanently resolved. Robert Axelrod, a leading author on conflict management, offers a compelling theory on the importance of cooperation in resolving conflicts. Robert Axelrod's Prisoner's Dilemma demonstrates the power of cooperation in leading to successful and permanent resolutions of conflict. Axelrod set up a game theory around a seemingly simple scenario. In Axelrod's Dilemma game, two players are given the choice to "cooperate" or "defect" Axelrod's game, two players are given choice to cooperate or defect. Axelrod's game got its name from a hypothetical situation where

two alleged criminals are detained for questioning in a crime. The police do not have enough evidence to convict either criminal. The two prisoners are isolated from each other and interrogated. The police offer both men a deal: offer evidence against the other detainee and go free. If neither accepts the offer but cooperate with each other through silence, both will receive only a small punishment due to the lack of evidence (Kriesberg, 2013).

However, if one betrays the other by confessing, he will gain the most by being freed and given immunity. The prisoner whose silent cooperation was not returned by the other prisoner will face the full punishment for the crime. If both prisoners betray the other, then both will be punished. This case, both will be punished less severely than if they had refused to talk at all. The dilemma is that both prisoners have a choice between a good and bad decision. But cannot make the good decision without knowing what the other prisoner will do (Kriesberg, 2013).

In the prisoner's Dilemma, only cooperation, and placing the importance the other person's interests, can avoid the lose-lose situation of punishment. This cooperation forms the foundation of Western conflict management theory. To achieve this cooperation, each team member must understand each side's positions, interest and needs. Teams can sometimes have difficulty developing this understanding. Each member's understanding is coloured by his or her views, personal agendas and objectives. Third leaders or outside mediators can often intervene to help bridge the different ideas and goals among team members, leading to better understanding and the ultimate goal of cooperation. These third parties must be able to identify and manage potential conflicts to achieve successful resolution (Lawrence & Jeffrey, 2017).

Strategies of conflict management strategies

1. Cognitive Strategies (learning): Often called defense mechanism, help an individual to falsify, distort or deny a particular conflict. Cognitive strategies represent an attempt to control or manage negative and disturbing feelings associated with conflict and to allow an individual to carry on with his normal activities. Cognitive strategies include repression (an attempt to push conflict out of existence) rationalization (hiding the truth from oneself), fantasy or even denial of reality.

2. Behavioural Strategies: For coping with interpersonal conflict include escape, withdrawal and aggression (especially against convenient targets). These strategies cannot resolve interpersonal conflict in any permanent way. They can be successful in the short-run. They can help an individual to reduce his level of anxiety and diminish his tension. They can prevent or avoid disruptive behaviour' but then cannot generate a solution. This can come about through the involvement of an expert consultant, acting in an accepting manner and encouraging the individual to evaluate his situation practically and decide upon more effective responses. Interventions in intrapersonal conflicts entails consideration of substantive issues, discussions and self - observations, helping an individual to unload his burdensome thoughts and reactions and reorienting towards a more benevolent and self - maintaining pattern of behaviour.

The strength of this approach to conflict management is that it helps the individual to concentrate on his situation and on ways to evaluate alternatives that may have gone unnoticed. The consultant remains detached from an individual, but his intervention, listening, probing, interviewing and explicit confrontation of the conflict issues sets the basis for self - diagnosis and improved performance. It eliminates distortion and increases self-knowledge. It is a method which seeks not merely an amelioration of the surface symptoms, but a successful change in the situational (e.g. re-evaluating a conflict situation) attitudinal (e.g. reduced anxiety, increased self-esteem) and behavioural (erg stimulate productive behaviour) components of a conflict. Consultants may be internal to an organization, *or* they may be

introduced to an administrator when circumstances require it. When organizations experience difficulties as a result of intrapersonal conflicts, administrators would be well - advised to manage such conflicts by leading their organization to seek professional help from persons who are trained to fulfil the role of organizational consultants. Successful organizational change does, after all, depend upon a strong commitment to conflict resolution.

Conflict in health institutions

Organizations are living systems consisting of interacting units arming a task in a mutually dependent manner within a structure of scarce resources. It seems commonplace to suggest that conflicts would present in such a setting. The parties in an organization may have a conflict about the distribution of resources, or they may have a more fundamental conflict about the very structure of their organization and the basic nature of their interaction. Once the parties are in a situation of goal incompatibility, their conflict develops in a dynamic fashion, initiating valuable and much needed constructive changes or leading to escalating strategies and destructive consequences. As there is nothing pre-determined about its course or seems erroneous to view conflict from a negative perspective only - as destructive or dysfunctional.

It is true that conflict may be uncomfortable, it may even be a source of problems, but it is absolutely necessary if change is to occur, if organizations are to survive and adapt. Organizational change and innovation does not happen, it requires a stimulant. Administrators must accept the need to influence the developmental dynamics of a conflict so that the parties' attitudes and actions will lead to better coordination and a more appropriate interdependence. They must seek to stifle or eliminate organizational conflict for that is hardly a realistic goal. As Rico noted, an organization devoid of conflict "may indicate autocracy, uniformity, stagnation and mental fixity", it will also be protecting only the vested interests of the Administrators must accept and indeed occasionally courage conflict, because change and other desirable consequences are products of conflict. The challenge administrator's face is to utilize such conflict management techniques that would ensure that as a conflict passes from a latent manifest phase, it proceeds towards its potential and realizes its constructive values (Katz, 2014; Singer, 2019; Rico, 2014; Thompson, 2010; Walton, 2019; Boulding, 2017; Brown, 2017).

Empirical literature

Brown (2017) 'investigated the impact of conflict management strategies on organizational performance of industrial workers in Nigeria. The descriptive survey research method was adopted for the study. A total of 247 respondents were selected for the study using proportionate stratified sampling technique. Instruments used for data collection. Linear regression analysis and t-test were used to test hypotheses that were generated for the study at 0.05 alpha levels. Finding reveals that there was a significant contribution of conflict management strategies on organizational performance. Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended that organizational support programme needs to be introduced and provided for all levels of workers in order to reduce the burden of work-family role conflict interface and virtually induced commitment to their jobs. The level of family responsibilities of the workers need to be considered during recruitment, in assigning responsibilities and placement process in order to foster organizational commitment'.

Aubert (2013) studied managerial strategies to conflict management in non-profit making organizations in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria. The study aimed at ensuring organizational development, productivity and societal growth. The study adopted the descriptive study pattern and used both the questionnaire method and personal interview in collecting data for the study. The research findings reveal among others that the causes of conflicts in non-profit making includes poor communication gap, ethnic and religion

differences, power tussle among staff, unequal distribution of rewards, competition over scarce resources.

Walton (2019) investigated the difference in the selection of employees' conflict management strategies at their workplace across different age groups and departments. For this purpose, a questionnaire was got filled from 100 employees of Pakistan Telecommunication Company Limited working at managerial level by applying convenient sampling technique'. 'Conflict management strategies were measured through a tool comprising of 20 items asked on five point Likert type scale. Chi-square test revealed that there is a significant difference in conflict management strategies adopted by employees. No overall difference of conflict management strategies was found between upper versus lower age group and support versus technical staff. However, younger employees choose compromising approach significantly higher than older employees. The study concluded that people adopt different conflict management strategies at the workplace. The research revealed that the preferred strategy for managing conflicts by PTCL employees is avoiding and the least used strategy is forcing. On the basis of age groups, the study could find no overall difference for conflict management strategies between younger and older employees (Lawrence & Jeffrey, 2017).

Research methodology

The design employed in this study is descriptive and correlational research design. Descriptive design is a systematic method which involves observing and describing the behavior of a subject without influencing it in any way. This research focused on conflict management strategies and performance of Health Institutions in Calabar Metropolis of Cross River State. The population of this study is one hundred (100) staff of selected Health Institutions in Calabar. The study adopted simple random sampling to select four Health Institutions. A total of eighty copies was correctly filled and returned as a sample size of the study.

Data for this study were gathered from primary source and through the use of structured questionnaire from respondents of the Institutions in Calabar. For this study, the researcher used the structured questionnaire designed with conflict management strategies and performance of Health Institutions. The study employed Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) analysis to measure the relationship between variables tested in the study.

Analysis of data

Hypothesis one

$H0_1$ There is no significant relationship between cognitive strategy (learning) and performance of Health Institutions.

Independent variable: Cognitive strategy

Dependent variable: Performance

Test statistic: Pearson product moment correlation coefficient

The 'analysis showed a correlation coefficient of 0.859 indicating the existence of strong positive relationship between cognitive strategy (learning) and performance of Health Institutions. The test was significant at 0.01 significant level and led to the rejection of the null hypothesis which states that cognitive strategy has no significant effect on performance. Consequently, the alternative hypothesis was accepted and conclusion reached that cognitive strategy has a significant relationship on performance of health institutions.

TABLE 1: Correlation result of relationship between cognitive strategy (learning) and performance of Health Institutions

		CS	PERF
CS	Pearson correlation	1	.859**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	Sum of squares and cross-products	128.38	191.21
	Covariance	.253	.246
	N	80	80
PERF	Pearson correlation	.859**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	Sum of squares and cross-products	176.41	622.44
	Covariance	.336	1.51
	N	80	80

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Hypothesis two

$H0_2$: There is no significant relationship between behavioral strategy and performance of Health Institutions.

Independent variable: Behavioral strategy

Dependent variable: Performance

Test statistic: Pearson product moment correlation coefficient

The analysis showed a correlation coefficient of 0.815 indicating the existence of strong positive relationship between behavioral strategy and performance of Health Institutions. The test was significant at 0.01 significant level, and led to the rejection of the null hypothesis which states that behavioral strategy has no significant effect on performance. The alternative hypothesis was consequently accepted and conclusion reached that behavioral strategy has a significant relationship on performance of Health Institutions.

TABLE 2: Correlation result of relationship between behavioral strategy and performance of Health Institutions

		BS	PERF	
BS	Pearson correlation	1	.815**	
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	
	Sum of squares and cross-products	321.74	136.94	
	Covariance	.431	.323	
	N	80		80
PERF	Pearson correlation	.815**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		
	Sum of squares and cross-products	146.94	125.22	
	Covariance	.315	.221	
	N	80	80	

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: SPSS analysis by Researcher, 2024.

Summary of findings

The major findings include:

1. Cognitive strategy has a positive significant relationship on performance of Health Institutions

2. Behavioural strategy has a positive significant relationship on performance of Health Institutions.

Conclusion

The conclusions are derived from the literature review and questionnaire administered. It is observed clearly 'that conflict is inevitable in any going concern. They also confirmed that they experience one form of conflict from one time to another in the cause of performing their tasks. Conflict may indeed be uncomfortable, if changes are to occur if organizations are to survive and adapt. The researcher also observed that all organizations, however simple or complex must pose a range of mechanism or procedures for managing conflict. A wide range of intervention activities may be utilized to deal with conflicts at various organizational levels. Therefore, administrators should be able to ascertain the presence of a conflict, its basic sources, the level at which it manifests itself, its degree of intensity and the ways of furthering the objectives of conflict resolution'

Recommendations

Based on the findings, 'the following recommendations are made:

1. Organizational changes and innovation does not just happen, it required a stimulant which is conflict. Therefore, Health Institutions should embrace conflict not only negatively but positively to enable them meet up with challenges.
2. Health Institutions must accept the needs to influence the developmental dynamics of a conflict, so that the parties' attitudes and actions will lead to better coordination and a more appropriate interdependence.
3. Health Institutions should apply the situational approach to conflict management because methods of conflict management which are appropriate in one case may not necessarily be appropriate when applied to a conflict generated from another source'.

References

Assael, H. (2019). Constructive Role of Inter-organizational conflict. *Administration Science Quarterly*, 1(1), 12-23

Assail, H. (2000). Constructive Role of Interorganizational Conflict, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 14.

Aubert V. (2013). Competition and Dissensus. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 1(1),12-34

Blake, R. R. (2014). Management Intergroup Conflict in Industry. *Journal of management, Journal of Economics,* 1(1),16-30

Boulding K. E. (2017). Organizations and Conflict. *Journal Conflict Resolution*, 1(1),16-30

Brown, J. S. (1967). Principles of Intrapersonal Conflict, *Journal of Conflict Resolution*. 1(1),34-56

Campbell, A. (2012). The Private Sector and Conflict Prevention Mainstreaming: Risk Analysis and Conflict Impact Assessment Tools for Multinational Corporations, (CIFP).

Corwin, R. G. (2019). *Patterns of Organizational Administrative Science* Quarterly. *Journal of Management,* 1(1),16-30

Deutshch, M. (2013). *The Resolution of Conflict*. New haven: Yale University Press

Dudley, W. (2012). The Eight Essential Steps to Conflict Resolution: Preserving Relationship at Work

Dutton, J. M. (2016). *Interdepartmental Conflict and Cooperation*: two Contrasting Studies, Human Organization.

Fink, C. F. (2018). Some Conceptual Difficulties in the Theory or Social Conflict, *Journal of Conflict Resolution*. 12412-460.

Galung, J. (2019). *Conflict as a way of Life*. Progress in Mental Health ed. By h. Freeman London: Churchill.

Ikeagwu, E. K. (2018). *Ground Work of Research Methods and Procedure*. Enugu: Institute for Development Studies.

Kenneth, B. U.; Uwem, M. E.; & Egong, M. M. (2024). Communal Resource Conflict Dynamics and Socio-Economic Development in Cross River State, Nigeria. Academy *Journal of Multidisciplinary Doctoral Research [AJMDR]* 2 (1), 103-113.

Kochan T. K. (2012). Conflict: Toward Conceptual Clarity, *Administrative Science Quarterly,* 1(1), 70-99.

Kriesberg, L. (2013). *The Sociology of Social Conflict.* Englewood Cliffs, N. J. Prentice Hall.

Lawrence, and C, Jeffrey S. (2017). *Breaking the Impasses*: Consensual Approaches to Resolving Public disputes; New York: Basic Books.

Litterer, J. A. (2016). Conflict in Organization: A Re-examill'1lion', *Academy of Management Journal,* 1(1),16-30

Mack, R. W. (2015). The Components of Social Conflict. *Journal of management*, 1(1), 16-30

Mitchell C. R. (2011). *The Structure of International Conflict*. London Macmillan.

Nkpoyen, F.; Kenneth, B. U. & Akpama, F. (2020). Political Party Defection and Governance in Yakurr/Abi Federal Constituency, Cross River State, Nigeria. International Journal of Geographical Information Science (GISBusiness), 15(4) 493-511.

Pondy, R. L. (2017), Organization Conflict: Concepts and Models, *Administrative Quarterly*, 1(3), 2-21

Rico, L. (2014), "Organization Conflict: A Framework for Reappraisal, Industrial Management Review.

Singer, K. (2019). The Meaning of Conflict, *Australian Journal of Philosophy*, 1(1), 16-30

Thomas, K. W. (2016). A Survey of Managerial Interests with Respect of Conflict. *Academy of Management Journal*, 1(1), 56-70

Thompson, J. D. (2010), "Organization Manager of conflict", *Administration Science Quarterly*. 2(1), 11-39

Walton, R. E. (2019). Organization Context and Interdepartmental Conflict, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 1(1), 16-30