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CONFLICT MANAGEMENT AND SERVICE DELIVERY: THE EXPERIENCE AT JOSEPH SARWUAN TARKA UNIVERSITY, MAKURDI, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Conflicts retard development and hence the need to manage same for service delivery. The effectiveness or otherwise of the management of conflict however depends on how well the causes of same have been understood and the right strategy applied. The study examined strategies used for the management of conflicts (compromise, collaboration, avoidance) among lecturers in the sampled colleges of Joseph Sarwuan Tarka University Makurdi (JOSTUM) to enthrone service delivery in the Institution. Information for the paper was collected through field survey via questionnaire, oral interview and observation as instruments, and from textbooks, official records and journal publications. The data presented and analyzed through tables and simple percentages revealed that the conflict management strategies used helped in the resolution of conflicts in the colleges with collaboration recording the highest response and avoidance strategy with the least response. Therefore, the study recommended, among others the optimum utilization of collaboration conflict management strategy in the resolution of issues among academic staff in the colleges under study to pave way for service delivery.

Keywords: Conflict, Conflict Management, Service Delivery, Experience, JOSTUM.

Introduction

Conflict is a natural phenomenon that is inevitable as long as human relationships are involved. When individuals interact among themselves in social settings, their ambitions over valued resources can easily trigger conflicts. At home and in our places of work, conflicts are very common and in some cases unavoidable (Mughal & Khan, 2013). They emanate as a result of failure to amicably resolve perceived grievances or disagreements among people. Conflicts can take many forms such as inter personal conflicts, task conflicts and process conflicts which may give rise to diverse approaches to its management.

Organizational conflict affects employee morale and turnover. This could retard service delivery and hence the need by individuals and governments world over to set up techniques for the management of same. Some of the conflict management techniques are available in the provision of Labour/Employment Act, 1974; Workmen's Compensation Act, 2010; Trade Dispute Amendment Decree No. 39 of 1988 and Trade Dispute Act 18 of 2004 which provided five steps for legal management of conflicts in organizations in Nigeria (Akinwale, 2011).

Conflict Management is the practice of identifying and handling conflict in a sensible, fair and efficient manner (Gordon, 2004). This involves the use of collaboration, compromise, sharing, competition, accommodation and avoidance strategy, among others. These techniques should be applied in accordance with the demands, time and situation. Litigations arising from unmanaged conflicts often result in huge financial cost to both parties. Hence, Parker (1974) had argued that if conflicts are not managed properly, they could lead to delay of work, disinterest, and lack of action; and in extreme cases, it might lead to complete breakdown of the group.

The management of conflict involves the use of internal and external machinery comprising of mediation, conciliation and reference of dispute to industrial arbitration panel, national industrial court and the constitution of a board of inquiry. In the resolution of conflict, the decision of the national industrial court is final and binding on the parties from the date of the judgment in the country.

The Trade Union Act 15 of 2015 is also used for managing conflicts in organizations and has been applied by many public organizations in Nigeria (Longe, 2015). In fact, conflict management involves doing things that could limit the negative effect of the phenomena and to increase the positive aspects of conflict with the aim of enhancing learning and group outcomes or performance in organizational settings (Rahim, 2011).

The effectiveness or otherwise of the management of conflict is largely dependent on how well the causes of same have been understood. Mayer, as cited in Tonder, Havenga and Visagie (2008) argued that if the causes of conflicts are known and understood, a conflict map can be developed to guide its management process. As one of the biggest drivers of change in organizational set up, if conflicts are properly handled, it can create stronger bonds, help people to be more innovative, build effective teams, establish stronger working relationships and eventually improve individual and organizational performance. The key is to openly face an issue and negotiate a win-win outcome from the parties involved (Garcia, 2013).

The Joseph Sarwuan Tarka University Makurdi (JOSTUM), just like other public universities in Nigeria has evolved several measures in resolving disputes among its academic staff to enthrone peaceful co-existence for optimum service delivery. Yet, Skirmishes appear to linger their heads among academic staff in the Institution. These have tended to hinder cooperation and togethernessamong lecturers and hence becoming a clog in the University's quest for achieving set objective of effective knowledge dissemination. Could this be as a result of low morale associated with the lack of academic infrastructural facilities, the display of sectional/tribal politics by the stakeholders or otherwise? The study is therefore set to qualitatively unravel the above misery using compromise, avoidance and collaboration conflict management strategies to give service delivery a chance in the University.

Methodology

Primary and secondary data/information were used for the study. The primary data were sourced from questionnaire, interview and observation. The questionnaire comprised of a set of multiple choice as well as Likert scale questions. Information generated from the 69 copies of questionnaire returned from field survey were presented, analyzed, and discussed via tables and simple percentages. Interview sessions were also held with academic staff in the

three colleges, and conflict issues observed by the researcher(s) during the 2014-2020 study periods were noted.

Out of the ten colleges in JOSTUM, three (3) were sampled for the study and they are College of: Science (29 lecturers/respondents), Animal Science (24 lecturers /respondents); and Management Sciences (27 lecturers/respondents). The lecturers in the 3 colleges whoformed the study population were asked to say whether or not Compromise, Collaboration and Avoidance as strategies of conflict management enhanced delivery of their services.
Secondary information for the study was however, culled from existing related literatures in books, journal articles and the University official documents.

Conceptual Framework
Major concepts of the study are defined and explained in this part of the work.

Conflict Management
Conflict management is a broad term that involves conflict resolution in organizations. It is a long term arrangement involving official organization and institutions for stopping and preventing conflict whenever it is about to arise (Mohammed, 2006). The concept involves a variety of ways by which people handle grievances, standing up for what they consider to be right against what they consider wrong.

Conflict management in organizations requires a combination of analytical and human skills. It influences individual wellbeing, group performance and organizational effectiveness (Casten, Arne, Bianca, Esther and Ankje as cited in Yusuf and Anvar, 2014). It involves doing things that limit the negative aspects of conflict and increase the positive aspects of conflict with the aim of enhancing co-existence, learning, group outcomes and performance in an organizational setting (Rahim, 2011).

According to Shanker (2013), conflict management is the ability to work under stress and continue to be productive. The author further stressed that it is a process of supportive confrontation and management of organizational conflict. Conflict management is deemed to be successful if it has achieved consensual agreement that is accepted by the conflicting parties.

Conflict Management Strategies
Conflicts are anti-developmental to every social setting and hence the need for managers to seek ways of resolving them whenever they occur. Adeyemi and Ademilua as cited in Lazarus (2014) sees conflict management strategies as the internal mechanisms used by various authorities in resolving conflicts. There are several conflict management strategies that can be used to resolve conflict situations. According to Locke (2009), conflict in organizations can be managed through mediation (intervention of a third party), negotiation (distributive/win-lose) and collaborative (win-win) measures. Ginnett and Curphy as cited in Kinnander (2011) outlines five common approaches for managing conflict viz: Competition, Accommodation, Sharing, Collaboration and Avoidance. Kondalkar (2007) however, states five different modes for resolving conflicts which are: avoidance, competing, collaborating, accommodating and compromising. In the same vein, Robbins et al (2008) identified two conflict handling intentions or techniques to include: cooperativeness (the degree to which one party attempts

to satisfy the other party's concerns) and assertiveness (the degree to which one party attempts to satisfy his or her own concerns). Each of the techniques is unique in its own way. No one is best in managing conflict as it depends on the parties to conflict, the time frame and the particular situation at hand. Conflict management techniques should be changed according to the demands and time of the situation. The five commonest techniques for resolving conflict earlier mentioned are explained below:

Compromise strategy: This is the traditional conflict resolving technique which is also known as the middle of the road approach. Ezeanyim (2010) opines that the technique, when applied each party to the conflict seeks to give up something, sharing occurs, resulting in a compromised outcome, as such there is no clear winner or loser. Rather, there is a willingness to ration the object of the conflict and accept a solution that provide incomplete satisfaction of both parties' concerns. Victor (2012) sees this technique as a "give-and-take" (bargaining or trading) method with moderate levels of both assertiveness and cooperativeness.

The compromise approach to conflict management could be applied when the goals and power of both sides of the conflicting parties are of equal importance, and when it is necessary to find a temporary, timely solution. Rahim (2011) asserted that the strategy is inappropriate when dealing with complex problems needing a problem-solution approach; though the approach is often used by practitioners to deal with complex problems and as a result fail to formulate effective, long-term solutions. However, compromise is a good "back-up" strategy which conflicting parties can fall back on if their attempts at problem solving (collaboration) and other strategies are unsuccessful. It may also involve third party interventions such as higher managerial authority, mediation or arbitration.

Compromise can also be used in conflict management when goals are important but not worth the effect of potential disruption of more assertive approaches, when opponents with equal power are committed to mutually effective goals, to achieve temporary settlements to complex issues, to arrive at expedient solutions under time pressure, as a backup when collaboration or competition is unsuccessful and can be the first step when parties do not know each other well or have not yet developed a high level of mutual trust, so it can help to improve relationships between two sides.

Avoidance strategy: When a person recognize that a conflict exist and wants to withdraw from it or suppress it, avoidance strategy is said to have been applied in managing conflict. In this style of conflict management, assertiveness and cooperativeness are low in the sense that neither of the parties considers their interest in the management of the issue at hand. Thus, people who fear conflict use the avoiding style to escape from conflict situations where everyone loses.

People who often apply avoiding style in conflict management face more conflicts as they avoid people with whom they disagree (Ajike, 2015). Worst of all, the issue at stake is never directly resolved or addressed. The style according to Victor (2012) is used in situations where there is no chance of winning, or when disruption would be very costly, when the issue is trivial, or more important issues are pressing for solution, when others can resolve the conflict more effectively, when issues seem symptomatic to other issues, when it takes too much time

to deal with it, when it is not the right time or place to discuss the issue, and when time is needed to think and collect information in order to be prepared before dealing with the issue.

Collaboration Strategy: This is concerned with cooperation and search for mutual benefit by the parties involved in conflict and the desire to also satisfy aspirations of others (Ezeanyim, 2010). The intentions of the parties is therefore, to solve the problem by clarifying differences rather than by accommodating various points of views through openness, exchange of information, and examination of differences to reach a solution acceptable to both parties. The strategy builds friendly environment of an organization where both employers and employees feel confident and free to share their knowledge or perceptions in order to make a simple point/combat conflict. It is the best method of handling conflict as it strives to satisfy needs of the parties that are involved (Kilman & Thomas, 2008).

Rahim (2001) opines that collaboration conflict management has two distinctive elements: confrontation and problem solving. Confrontation involves open communication, clearing up misunderstandings and analyzing the underlying causes of conflict. This is a prerequisite for problem solving which involves identification and solution to the real problem(s) to maximize satisfaction to concerns of both parties. Rahim (2011) further asserted that collaboration strategy is useful for effective dealing with complex problems especially when one party alone cannot solve the problem. Ajike (2015) found that individuals who use integrative (collaborative) style in conflict handling experience lower level of work conflict and stress at job.

Collaboration strategy is often used when: concerns of both parties are too important to be compromised, objective is to learn, insights from people are to be merged from different perspective, commitment is to be gained by incorporating concerns into consensus, feelings that have interfered with a relationship are to be worked out, there is a high level of trust, a person doesnot want to have full responsibility; and it is necessary to build long-term relationships. It is however inappropriate for use when: task/problem is simple/trivial, other parties do not have adequate training and experience for problem solving or when they are unconcerned about the outcome. Above all, collaboration strategy takes a great deal of time and energy in conflict management.

Competing Strategy: This is the win-lose approach where a manager acts in a very assertive way to achieve his or her own goals without seeking to cooperate with other employees, or at the expense of others. The approach may be appropriate for emergencies when time is of a valued asset.

Service Delivery

Service delivery relates to the characteristics of the service offered to the target customer or client. It is a component of business or activities that defines the interaction between service providers and customers; where the provider offers a service, whether that is in information or a task, and the client either finds value or loses as a result. Good service delivery provides clients with an increase in value. Since a service system is characterized by the relationships occurring between people, service processes, and physical elements, these dimensions must be considered jointly to effectively plan and conceive the service delivery system.

Service delivery is crucial in organizations especially those that render intangible services. The power to deliver optimal and quality service attracts organizations to competitive advantages among others in the same industry, and many organizations enhance their effectiveness by delivering service to customers to enhance their internal and external operations. To provide quality service to customers, service providers must understand and respect their clients' needs, attitudes and concerns. The client's perceptions are in turn affected by personal, social and cultural factors.

Delivering services of high quality are an important tool for service providers to create and provide value of their operations to customers. Through this, organizations can achieve increased customers' satisfaction, loyalty and therefore long-term patronage / profitability. Thus, service organizations need to plan the delivery of their services and to ensure the successful implementation of the actual plan. Continuous improvement of service procedures also greatly contributes to the optimization of service delivery system and enhances the organizations standard of service. Humphrey (1998) identified the delivery of quality service across the whole range of its activities as an essential task of the public service with a strong focus on processes, an emphasis on work done and maximum value for money.

Anazodo, Okoye & Chukwuemeka (2012) identified the principles of service delivery to include:

i. specification of the quality of service to be provided by the departments and offices to their customers,
ii. consultation with, and participation by customers on a structured basis,
iii. provision of quality information and advice to customers, in relation to the methods of delivery of services,
iv. integration of public services at local, regional and national levels,
v. comprehensive system of measuring and assessing customer satisfaction; and
vi. compliance and redress mechanisms which operate close to the point of delivery.

Service delivery, as discernable from the foregoing therefore indicates "where, when and how" the service or product is delivered to customers in terms of its quality, efficiency and timelines.

The quality of service should start from need of the customers and end at customers' expectation (Kotler, 2003). This means that good quality perception is not based on the service provider but on the point of view/perception of the customer.

Customers' perception of services is a comprehensive assessment of a service benefits which consistently meet their needs and desires. Service timeliness refers to the time of work produced; which is how fast, when, or what employee or department, or work unit produced the work. Customers typically appreciate targeted marketing offers due to their personalized nature and alignment with their preferences. However, the timeliness of such offer is as important as their quality and relevance. To best understand how customers fell, their feedback should be solicited regularly (Armstrong, 2009). Service timeliness is thus related to the amount of effort put forward by an employee. The effort entails the amount of physical and mental energy that the individual spends in a specific period of time in the work, in addition to the speed in performance.

Service efficiency entails the ability to avoid wasting materials, energy, efforts, money, and time in doing something or in producing a desired result. It is a measure of the extent to which input is well used for an intended task or function (output). Maphephe (2013) defined efficiency as the allocation of scarce resources that maximizes the achievement of aims. The author stressed that to understand fully the meaning of "efficiency" it is necessary to understand the terms; inputs, outputs (including quality and quantity) production, and level of service.

Results and Discussion

Data collected during field survey from lecturers in the Institution were presented, analyzed and discussed in this part of the study using tables and simple percentages. This began with the distribution and return of questionnaire to lecturers in the colleges as seen on table 1 of the study.

Table 1: Distribution and return of questionnaire

Colleges/ Respondent	Number distributed	Number returned	Number not returned	% of total returned	% of total not returned
Science	29	25	4	36.23	36.36
Animal Science	24	20	4	28.98	36.36
Management Sciences	27	24	3	34.78	27.27
Total	**80**	**69**	**11**	**100 Appr.**	**100 Appr.**

Source: *Field Survey, 2021*

As seen on table 1 of the study, 80 sets of questionnaire were distributed to lecturers in the 3 colleges of JOSTUM during the field survey. Out of these, 69 sets of questionnaire were properly completed and returned, and 11 sets of questionnaire were not returned. Analyses in the paper were therefore based on the sets of questionnaire that were properly completed and returned during the field survey.

The 69 sampled lecturers in the 3 colleges of the Institution were asked to say if Compromise, Collaboration and Avoidance as conflict management strategies helped in resolving conflicts among lecturers in their respective colleges and their responses were as explained / analyzed on tables 2, 3 and 4.

Table 2: Compromise is helpful in the resolution of conflict among lecturers in my College

Responses/Colleges	College of Science	College of Animal Science	College of Mgt. Sciences	Total	% of total respondents
Agree	10	08	08	26	37.68
S/agree	08	07	08	23	33.33
Undivided	01	02	02	05	7.24
Disagree	04	01	02	07	10.14
S/disagree	02	02	04	08	11.59
Total	**25**	**20**	**24**	**69**	**100 Appr.**

Source: *Field Survey, 2021*

The surveyed data on table 2 shows that 49 respondents represented by 70.01% agreed/strongly agreed that compromise conflict management strategy was used in resolving conflicts among lecturers in the 3 colleges of JOSTUM, 5 or 7.24% of the respondents were neutral, while the remaining 15 (or 21.73%) respondents disagreed/strongly disagreed. In comparing the percentage difference of the respondents who agreed/strongly agreed with those who disagreed/strongly disagreed, it can be inferred that compromise conflict management strategy helped in resolving conflicts among lecturers in the 3 colleges of the Institution during the period under study.

Data obtained from oral interview also corroborated the above assertion. Compromise conflict management strategy as was gathered during oral interview with Moses Ushahemba, a lecturer in one of the colleges had been applied in finding temporary and timely solutions to crises among same in the Institution, though it is inappropriate in dealing with complex issues needing problem-solution approach as opined by Rahim (2011). As a middle of the road approach, lecturers, as observed, have been seeing giving up some of their desires/aspirations and hence receiving incomplete satisfaction as opined by Ezeanyim (2010) for the sake of peaceful co-existence.

The sampled lecturers in the colleges under study were also asked to say whether or not collaboration conflict management strategy helped in the settlement of conflicts among them and their responses were as explained on table 3.

Table 3: Collaboration is helpful in resolving conflicts among lecturers in my college

Responses/Colleges	College of Science	College of Animal Science	College of Mgt. Sciences	Total	% of total respondents
Agree	09	07	10	26	37.68
S/agree	10	07	08	25	36.23
Undivided	01	01	02	04	5.79
Disagree	03	01	02	06	8.69
S/disagree	02	04	02	08	11.59
Total	**25**	**20**	**24**	**69**	**100 Appr.**

Source: *Field Survey, 2021*

As seen on table 3, 51 respondents represented by 73.91% agreed/strongly agreed that collaboration conflict management strategy helped in resolving conflicts among lecturers in the 3 colleges of the Institution during the period of the study, 4 (or 5.79%) of the respondents were neutral, and the remaining 14 (or 20.28%) respondents disagreed/strongly disagreed to the statement. In comparing the percentage difference of the respondents who agreed/strongly agreed with those who disagreed/strongly disagreed, it can be seen that the strategy (collaboration) helped in resolving conflicts among lecturers in the colleges of the University during the period of the study.

Information obtained through oral interview points to the fact that collaboration conflict management strategy was mostly (largely) applied in the colleges for conflict management. According to some of the lecturers in the colleges (Madaki Jerome, Raymond Elaigwu and Roseline Akaabee), collaboration conflict management strategy bothers on the search for

mutual benefits by the parties involved in conflict and the desire to satisfy aspirations of others as asserted by Ezeanyim (2010). The strategy, according to the respondents also enabled parties in conflict to share their knowledge in order to solve the issue(s) at stake, and is considered to be the best method of handling conflict (Kilman & Thomas, 2008).

The respondents were further asked to say if avoidance conflict management strategy helped in the resolution of conflict among lecturers and their responses were as analyzed on table 4.

Table 4: Avoidance is helpful in resolving conflict among lecturers in my college

Responses/Colleges	College of Science	College of Animal Science	College of Mgt. Sciences	Total	% of total respondents
Agree	08	06	09	23	33.33
S/agree	07	05	07	19	27.53
Undivided	03	02	03	08	11.59
Disagree	04	03	02	09	13.04
S/disagree	03	04	03	10	14.49
Total	**25**	**20**	**24**	**69**	**100 Appr.**

Source: *Field Survey, 2021*

As seen on table 4, 42 respondents (60.86%) agreed/strongly agreed that avoidance strategy was used in resolving conflicts among lecturers in the 3 colleges during the period of the study, 8 respondents (11.59%) were neutral and 19 respondents (27.53%) disagreed/strongly disagreed to the statement. In comparing the percentage difference of respondents who agreed/strongly agreed with those who disagreed/strongly disagreed, it can be seen that the drift was more towards the assertion that avoidance conflict management strategy helped in the resolution of conflicts among lecturers in the colleges.

Data obtained from interview and observation during field survey also corroborated that avoidance conflict management strategy was usefully applied in conflict resolution in the colleges under study. To this effect, Apesuugh Iornenge, a lecturer in the college of science stated that most of the conflicts in his College, and the University at large have been resolved by withdrawal or suppression of opinion/intentions by lecturers for the sake of peace. The respondent however lamented that rather than solving problems, the approach results in multiplication of conflicts as opined by Ajike (2015). The style is always used when issues at stake are trivial, or more important issues are pressing for solution, and when others can resolve the conflict more effectively, etc. Unfortunate enough, the strategy makes the issue at stake not resolved or addressed, andwas least applied (see tables 2,3&4) in conflict management in the 3 colleges during the period of the study.

Summary of Findings

Conflicts are anti-developmental in all societies and hence the need by all and sundry to stamp out same in organizations. Thus, different strategies have been evolved in the sampled colleges of JOSTUM to checkmate conflicts to give service delivery a chance. Out of the strategies used, collaboration strategy recorded the highest response and was followed by compromise strategy, while avoidance strategy recorded least acceptance (responses) by the

respondents. However, none of the strategies is best in managing conflict as it depends on the parties to conflict, the time frame and the situation at hand.

Compromise conflict management strategy results in compromised outcome, and as was observed during the study is often applied in finding temporary and timely solutions to issues, and hence not appropriate in dealing with complex problems needing problem-solution approach by lecturers.

Avoidance conflict management strategy is used by those who fear conflict and temporary escape from same. As was gathered in the study, such people face more conflicts as they avoid people with whom they disagree and leave the issue(s) at stake unresolved/solved.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conflict, when not effectively managed impedes service delivery. In order to check its menace in the colleges under study, it is important by stakeholders to identify and understand the nature of conflict(s) to facilitate their solutions as the strategy to be applied usually depend on the nature, time and circumstance at a point in time.

The study therefore recommended that:

(i) collaboration conflict management strategy should always be used in the resolution of conflicts among lecturers in the studied colleges as it allows open communication and discussion on problem issues for amicable solution to warrant service delivery.

(ii) compromise conflict management technique results in compromised outcome and should only be applied in the college for temporary and timely solutions to conflicts; and complex issues in the colleges handled using collaboration strategy to allow service delivery a chance; and

(iii) application of avoidance conflict management strategy leave issues unresolved or solved and should not be used in the studied colleges in resolving conflicts among lecturers except when time, nature and circumstance permits it.

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