STRATEGIES FOR MANAGING ORGANIZATIONAL CONFLICTS IN IMO STATE SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines strategies for managing organizational conflicts in Imo State secondary schools, Nigeria. The paper defines organization, conflicts, organizational conflicts, views school as an organization. It discusses conflicts from traditional, behavioral, and integrationist perspective, identifying organizational conflicts as a major challenge hindering effective administration and academic performance. Causes and effects of conflicts are examined, and strategies for managing conflicts (avoidance, smoothing, compromise, collaboration) are proposed. The paper suggests, that school heads/ managers as administrators of schools should have adequate knowledge to handle conflicts causes and choose appropriate strategies. A proactive approach to conflict management is recommended, emphasizing school management understands of suitable strategies for conflict situations.

Keywords: Organization, conflicts, schools, organizational conflicts, and schools as an organization.

Introductions

Organizational Conflicts are inevitable in any institution, including secondary schools in imo state, Nigeria; these conflicts can hinder effective administration and academic performance, affecting the overall quality of education. There is bound to be conflicts especially when people with divergent views and background are together. Whether one is working with teams or individuals, conflict inevitably occurs. Whenever people work together, the potential for conflict exists. This is because people do not always agree on anything and because people inevitably compete. The conflict may be a clash between formal authority and theindividuals and groups, affected or a dispute over how revenues should be divided, how the work should be done and how long and hard people should work. It may involve jurisdictional disagreements among individuals, departments, and between unions and management. It may also include rivalries, jealousies, personality clashes, role definitions, and struggles for power and favor. This position paper examines strategies for managing organizational conflicts in imo

state secondary schools, with a view to enhancing school administration and academic performance.

Organization

The paper explores the concept of organization, conflicts, an organizational conflicts and views school as an organization. An organization refers to a structured entity, such as school, with a defined purpose, goals, and roles.In this context, a school is an organization with a mission to provide quality education. According to Plunkett and Attner (2015), organization is an entity managedby one or more persons to achieve stated goals. Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, sees an organization as a social entity that has a collective goal and is linked to an external environment. The Oxford Dictionary (2016) defines an organization as a group of people who manage a business, club, etc. together in order to achieve a particular aim. This means that the fundamental basis and purpose for forming an organization is to achieve a common goal. With Wikipedia defines, an organization as a social entitythat has a collective goal and is linked to an external environment, It is this collective goal that makes an organization what it is.

School as an Organization

The school is an organization because there are different departments working harmoniously. Administration, management, faculty, services. These departments make school a complete organization. Ikediugwu (2017) posits that the school is a formal organization to the extent that it is a social unit structure whose principal function is the transmission of knowledge. The school also possesses the four characteristics of formal organizations - adaptation, goal attainment, integration and latency. (Parson, 2018 in Ikediugwu, 2017).

Conflicts

Conflict refer to disagreement, tensions, or disputes between individuals or groups within the school setting. These can arise from differences in interest, values or goals. It is a state of unresolved differences between two entities, whether human or organizational. To Pierre and Peppers (2020) conflict is widely used to describe important differences between individual humans or group of humans. Hutton and Hunt (2018) in Ikediugwu (2017) define conflict as a struggle or quarrel usually between individuals or groups in the process of competing for something. This implies that when we quarrel or struggle for dominance or recognition, or compete in one form or another against others, we are invariably creating a conflict situation.

Stoner (2016) in Plunkett and Attner (2018) sees conflict as disagreement between two or more organizational members or teams. In other words, conflicts area disagreement between people.

Organizational Conflict

Organizational conflict refers to disputes or tensions within the school organization, involving staff, students, or other stakeholders. These conflicts can impact school effectiveness and academic performance. And according to Wikipedia (retrieved 30th June, 2015) is a state of discord caused by the actual or perceived opposition of needs, values and interests between

people working together. When there is disharmony between and among people working together in an organization, organizational conflict has occurred.

Conflict can be negative (dysfunctional conflict) or positive (functional conflict). A dysfunctional conflict is a conflict which limits the organization's ability to achieve its objectives while functional conflict supports the objectives of the organization especially when performance is low. People can be motivated to improve performance by competition and kind of conflicts, by, theythinking their ways it's better than someone else's (Stoner, 2020 in Plunkett and Attner, 2022).

Approaches and Views of Conflicts:

There are three approaches to conflict depending on how one view conflict.

These are the traditional, the behavioral and interactionism views of conflict.

Traditional View: According to Plunkett and Attner (2018), the manager who views conflict as unnecessary and harmful to an organization fears conflict and eliminates all evidence of it. Such a manager holds the traditional view of conflict. If conflict does occur, the manager perceives it as a personal failure. In the school system, a school head that holds the traditional view of conflict views conflict as unnecessary and harmful to the success of the school and as such tries to eliminate all evidence of it.

Behavioral View: The behaviorist, according to Pluiikett and Attner (2020), recognizes that conflict frequently occurs because of human nature, the need to allocate resources, and organization life. According to them, a manager who holds the behavioral view expects conflict. He or she believes that, on occasion, conflict can produce positive results. A school head with a behavioral view believes that conflict is harmful and therefore tries to resolve or eliminate it as soon as it occurs.

Interactionism View: The interactionism view holds that conflict is not only inevitable but also necessary for organizational health. Furthermore, this view maintains that conflict can be good or bad, depending on how it i managed. A manager (school head) with an interactionism view attempt to harness conflict to maximize its positive potential for organizational growth and to minimize its negative effects (Plunkett and Attner, 2020).

Reasons for Conflicts:

Conflict can arise for many reasons. Anderson (2015) identifies four causes of conflict as managerial expectation, breakdown in communication, misunderstanding the information and lack of accountability as causes of conflict. Plunkett and Attner (2017) identify competition, differences in objective, differences in values, attitudes, and perceptions, disagreements about role requirements, work activities, individual approaches and breakdown in communication as sources of conflict. These are discussed below.

1. **Managerial Expectations:** It is the job of an employee to meet the expectations of his manager, but if those expectations are misunderstood, conflict can arise. Managers need to

spend time clearly communicating their goals to employees and then confirming those goals in writing. He should also encourage his employees to ask questions about their goals, and hold regular meetings to discuss the goals and how best to reach them (Anderson, 2015). In the school, it is the duty of the teacher to meet the expectations of the school head but sometimes these expectations are misunderstood and this causes conflict.

2. Competition: Competition can take the form of two individuals trying to outperform each other. Competition can also erupt over a struggle for limited resources. The head of each work unit depends on the allocation of money, personnel, equipment, materials, and physical facilities to accomplish his or her objectives.

Some heads or managers inevitably receive fewer resources than others. This can lead not only to a lack of cooperation but to open conflict s well. Conflict can also arise from corn. petition for rewards associated with performance (Plunkett and Attner, 2020).

3. Misunderstanding the Information: Internal conflict can arise as a result of simple misunderstanding. One person may misunderstand information, and that can trigger a series of conflicts.

4: Differences in Objectives: Personal objectives may differ from those of the school. A teacher's aim may be to advance within the school over a specified period of time, whereas the school may have a tradition of seasoning its staff over a longer period. There may be conflict in this situation.

Individuals may have conflict with each other. Two individuals in the schoolnotmay interfere with each other's work. Departments within the organization may also develop conflicting objectives.

5. Differences in Values, Attitudes and Perceptions: The value system and perceptions of each individual differ from those of others. These differences can lead to conflict (Plunkett and Attner). For instance, how a teacher tangles his/her duties or views a situation may differ from others and even the school. There are individual differences and as long as these differences exist, there are bound to be conflicts.

6. Breakdown in Communication: Communication is not always perfect. If the receiver is not listening actively, the receiver may simply misunderstand the sender. The result can be a disagreement about goals, roles, or intentions. Sometimes, information is withheld intentionally, for personal gain or to embarrass a colleague (Plunkett and Attner, 2020).

Strategies for Managing Organizational Conflict:

According to Plunkett and Attner (2020), for a "manager to effectively manage conflicts, he must be able to analyze a conflict situation. A viable strategy for conflict management begins with an analysis of the conflict situation and then moves to the development of strategy options". How can the manager do this? He has to first of all find out who is in conflict as the conflict may be between individuals, groups or departments in the school. Then, he determines

the source of the conflict as it may arise from competition, personal differences, lack of communication, poor planning, etc. This requires viewing the situation through the eyes of the parties involved. Finally, he ascertains the level of conflict, whether it requires immediate attention or not. If the goal of the school is threatened, an immediate action is mandatory. When the managehas analyzed the situation, he then develops a strategy for managing the conflict.

Montana (2018) identifies avoidance, smoothing, dominance or power intervention, compromise and confrontation as the strategies a manager could use to manage conflict in the organization. To Plunkett and Attner (2020), avoidance, smoothing, compromise, collaboration, confrontation, appeals to ordinate objectives and decisions by a third party are possible strategies a manager could employ to manage conflict in the organization. These strategies are discussed individually.

1. Avoidance: Montana (2018) describes avoidance as a management strategy which includesnon-attention or creating a total separation of the combatants or a partial separation that allows limited interaction. Plunkett and Attner (2020) see it as a conflict strategy in which a manger ignores the conflict situation. It implies avoiding conflict by withdrawing, sidestepping or postpone. Avoidance is sometimes the best solution in conflicts resolution. It involves the manager withdrawing or in some cases ignoring the conflict and allowing those involved to resolve it themselves.

When should a manager use this strategy? Avoidance is best used when the conflict is small or trivia and relationships are at stake, when more important issues are pressing and the manager feels he or she does not have time to deal with a particular one, when one has no power and sees no chance of getting his concerns met, when you are emotionally involved and others around you solve the conflict more successfully and when more information is needed (https://home.snug.edukhcUlbert/CoflfliCt.htm). It can also be used when a manager does not want to be deal with a situation has its drawbacks too as important decisions may be made by default. Postponing may also make matters worse.

2: Smoothing:

This is a technique which stresses the achievement of harmony between disputants (Montana, 2008). Plunkett and Attner (1997) define it as a conflict strategy in which the manager diplomatically acknowledges that conflicts exists but downplays its importance. You will acknowledge the existence of a conflict but accords it little importance. This strategy can be used when there are no real issues to resolve. Smoothing does not work when real issues exist.

3: Compromise

This is a winsome/loses some premise. It is a conflict resolution strategy in which each party gives something up (Plunkett and Attner, 2020). To Montana (2018), compromise seeks a resolution which satisfies at least part of each party's position. Compromise is used if the conflicting parties are equal in power or status, when major issues are not involved, when a

temporary solution to a complex issue is desirable or if time pressures force a quick resolution (Plunkett and Attner, 2020).

Its drawbacks are that important values and long-term objectives can be derailed in the process. It may not work if initial demands are too great. It can spawn cynicism especially if there is no commitment to honor the compromise solutions (http://home.snug.edu/hiulber/conflict.htm).

4. Collaboration:This is a conflict strategy in which the manager focuses on mutual problem solving by both parties (Plunkett and Attner, 2020). Collaboration is a win-win approach to conflict resolution. This approach can be used when there is a high level of trust, when you do not want to have full responsibility, when you want others to also have "ownership" of solutions, when the people involved are willing to change their thinking as more information is found and new options are suggested and when you need to work through animosity and hard feelings. But collaboration has its drawbacks too. This process takes a lot of time and energy and some may take advantage of other people's trust and openness (http://home.snu.edu/hailber/conflict.htm).

5: Confrontation: According to Plunkett and Attner (2020) confrontation is a conflict strategy that forces parties to verbalize their positions and area of disagreement. It features a thorough and frank discussion of the sources and types of conflict and achieving a resolution that is in the best interest of the group, but that may be at the expense of one or all of the conflicting parties (Montana, 2008). The goal is to identify a reason to favor one solution or another and thus resolve the conflict. Confrontation however often ends in hurt feelings and no resolution.6: Dominance or Power Intervention

This is the imposition of a solution by higher management, other then the level at which the conflict exists (Montana, 2018). This approach can be used when there is a major crisis and issues are escalating.

7: Appeals to Super-ordinate Objectives

A super-ordinate objective is a goal or an objective that overshadows personal interests, to which a manager, can appeal as a strategy for resolving conflict (Plunkett and Attner, 2020). A manager can identify super-ordinate objectives that will allow the disputing parties to rise above their conflict. For example, if two conflicting parties agree that a move is in the best interest of the organization, each will move beyond the conflict

8: Decisions by a Third Party

A third party may be invited to resolve a conflict situation. He may be another supervisor/teacher, an upper-level manager, a departmental head, etc. The manager may be the third party if the conflict is between two subordinates.

Conclusions: Conflict is a state of unresolved difference between two entities, human or organization. This paper attempts to identify' the strategies for resolving organizational conflict. It looked into causes or sources of conflicts in organizations and finally examines

strategies a manager can employ in resolving organizational conflict. As school is an organization, all the causes and strategies of resolving organizational conflict discussed in this paper are applicable to it. The school head can make use of these strategies in resolving conflicts that may arise in the school.

Recommendations

As conflict is inevitable in human relationship, the researchers recommend that

1. That periodic seminars on conflicts and conflict resolution be organized for the school personnel.

2. That school managements should have adequate knowledge of causes of conflict situations in the school.

3. That school managements should know the most appropriate strategy to employ in handling a particular conflict situation.

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