

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES OF UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATORS IN SOUTH-WEST NIGERIA.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to find out, the types, causes of conflict and management techniques of resolving conflicts by university administrators.

It was a descriptive research design of the survey type which aimed at eliciting information from the university administrators. The administrators include the Vice-Chancellors, Deputy - Vice Chancellors (Academic and Administration) Registrars, Librarians, Bursars, Heads of Departments, Deans of Faculties, and Postgraduate schools, Directors of programmes and services, A sample of four universities selected through stratified random sampling was used for the study.

This comprised two state universities and two federal universities. Five research questions were raised and answered. Questionnaires were distributed to four hundred respondents to elicit information on conflict management strategies of University Administrators. The study identified common types and causes of conflict between academic staff and professional administrators, students and Administrators.

Appropriate management strategies to minimize conflict in Nigeria universities were identified. Recommendations were made on how to maintain peace among the university administrators, Academic staff and students for effective administration.

Keywords:-Conflict, Management Strategies, Administrator, Universities. Information.

Introduction

Conflict is a situation of disagreement between two parties. A conflict situation is therefore one that is characterized by the inability of those concerned to iron out their differences. Conflict is an evitable feature of organizational life. The state of health of an organisation lies along a continuum that ranges from a conflict - free organisation to a conflict ridden organization. Organisation like the universities is not immune from conflict. This is because, in any circumstances where two or more people co-exist to form an organization conflict is anticipated. The modern university system comprises a variety of communities based on the wide range of academic disciplines and functions. Its Internal behaviour constitutes a very complex organism shaped by these many hands.

This implies that, internally the university life is shaped by many logic, habits and dynamics. It is also influenced by various challenges, constraints and pressures from the outer environment. The combinations of external pressures and internal pressures within

the university systems made administration very difficult and complex, therefore conflict is inevitable

Many Universities in Nigeria are residential institutions with municipal characteristics such as Hall of residence, staff quarters, medical centres, water scheme, staff school, etc. Some state universities are non-residential. There are no halls of residence for students and staff but Health centres, water schemes, power plants etc are provided. All these are managed by university administrators, professionals and academic alike. In the course of carrying out their duties or roles there are bound to be conflicts. Stern (1991) Alade (1998) and Akorede (2005) noted that conflicts are natural part of life

When disagreements among people in a social milieu remain unsolved, they graduate into conflicts. Conflicts is defined as a by-product of the interaction of people or groups with different expectations, interests and backgrounds, in the society. Role conflict can thus be said to be inevitable, unavoidable, natural and a normal part of any organization like university. Although, conflict may be dysfunctional if mismanaged, it may be desirable to the nature of change and a minimal level of conflict is optimal (Ibukun "1997) . The objective of this study was to find out types, causes and management strategies of role conflicts between Academics and professional administrators.

Theoretical Framework

The study was hinged on the conflict Process Theory proposed by Goldman (1966), in Alade (1998). The theory states that the observation of conflicts pertaining to major organisational offices is a reliable procedure for sampling the developmental tendencies of the organization as a whole. Therefore when universities experience positive/non-destructive role conflicts, innovations and creativity would emerge, which will further lead to better conflict resolutions and conflict avoidance thus improving the administrators' effectiveness and efficiency in accomplishing set goals and objectives of the universities.

Another theory that lends credence to this study is the structural-functional Theory propounded by Persons (1960) in Alade (1998). The theory postulates that individuals normally adjust to a given structure in an organisation but any change in the structure of the organisation causes conflict and destabilizes the organisation. Conflict should be minimised by minimizing structural changes in order to maintain stability with both the individuals as well as the institutions. The implication is that universities should be mindful of their organisational charts and careful at making changes that may not be easily accepted by the university community.(Okotoni 2002).

Types of Role Conflict

There are basically four forms of conflict. Intra -personal, Inter-personal, Inter-group or Intra group. Conflicts become interpersonal or inter-group when they take the form of open actions such as hostile reactions, strike actions, etc against another persons or groups but until the hostile feelings are acted upon, it remains at the level of intrapersonal problem only. In an organization a person's role can be in conflict with another person's, individuals or groups emanating from the responsibilities entrusted to them in an organization. Roles conflicts arise as a result of role ambiguity where people are not clear about what they expect of each other or of one another, where roles are not properly spelt out and individuals' or groups' responsibilities are not clearly stated,

workers may not be able to build up expectations of one another because of role ambiguity (Olutade 2005).

Causes of role conflict in the university includes work interdependence, mutual dependence on limited resources, differences in performance criteria and reward systems, differences in units and subunits orientation and goals and differences in status and jurisdictional ambiguities. Personal or behavioural such as differences in background, personal traits, values, communication, perceptions, attitudes, and emotions. Ibukun (1997) highlighted some conflict resolution measures such as the use of authority, and command, problem solving, appeal to superior organisation goals, changing the structure of the organisation, prevention and avoidance, expansion of opportunities and resources, compromise and agreement and changing the behaviour of people involved in conflict through dialogue.

Statement of the problem

It has been observed that Nigeria universities has for decades been faced with so many crisis ranging from conflict between academic staff and university administrators, students versus Academic staff, students versus university authorities, Non-Academic staff versus university administrators. The conflicts have given rise to distrust and hostility among professionals and academics thus contributing in hampering smooth, effective and efficient administration in the universities. It also appeared that despite this situation, stakeholders in education seemed to develop non-challant attitude towards these conflicts. If this role conflict is not checked it can be descriptive and negative as people involved will often see one another as enemies. This is unwholesome for the University community and Nigeria educational system as a whole. It therefore becomes expedient that role conflict among university administrators in Nigeria be investigated to proffer feasible strategies for minimizing or avoiding it. This study therefore examined the causes, types of role conflict between university professional and academic administrators in South-West Nigeria as well as strategies employed to reduce and avoid them. The following research questions were raised to guide the study.

- What are the most common types of conflicts between professional administrators academic and administrators in Nigeria Universities?
- What are the major causes of role conflict between professionals and academics in Nigeria Universities?
- What are the consequences of conflict in Nigeria Universities
- What are the most commonly used strategies in managing conflict in Nigeria universities
- What are the most effective management strategies for minimizing conflict between Professional and academic administrators in Nigeria Universities.

Method

This study is a descriptive research design of the survey type. It was adopted because the design was judged to be the most realistic of other designs since it investigates phenomenon systematically, especially the qualities of a given population or area of interest. The target population was made up of all current heads of academic and non-academic departments, directors of academic programmes and physical services, Deans of faculties and post graduate schools, registrars, Bursars, Deputy Vice-Chancellors, and Vice-Chancellors of one hundred and twenty two universities in

Nigeria. 36 owned by Federal Government, 36 owned by State Government and 50 privately owed. For the study sample, four universities were sampled. Stratified sampling was used to select these universities in the south-west Nigeria. This comprised two state universities and two Federal universities. Questionnaire tagged (CMSUA) (Conflict management strategy of university administrators) were administered on the four hundred selected administrators in the sampled universities. All the questionnaire were retrieved and were made up of 200 professional administrators and 200 academic administrators.

The instrument for data collection was a forty seven items Likert-type questionnaire developed by the researcher Titled conflict management strategies of university administrators (CMSUA).Part 1 of the instrument was on bio-data of the respondents. Part II has 47 items which elicit information on the types, causes and management strategies employed by university Administrators in solving conflict situation in universities. The response scale was scored as follows. Strongly agree, Disagree frequently and Rarely. Highly Effective, Moderately effective and ineffective. The reliability of the instrument was determined through the test-retest method. The instrument was administered twice on twenty five academic and twenty five professional administrators outside the selected universities within a time lapse of three weeks. The computed reliability co-efficient of 0.84 was obtained and it was considered high enough for reliability.

Data Analysis

In analyzing the data, frequency count, mean, score, percentages, were used.

Results

The results of the data analyses that answered questions one to five were presented in Tables 1-5 respectively.

Research Question one:- What are the causes of conflict between professionals and academic administrators in South-west universities?

Table 1: Frequency of occurrence of different types of conflict in South-West Nigerian universities.

S/N	Items	N	frequency	%	Rarely	%
1	Conflict between Academic and the professional administrators	400	309	77.25	91	22.75
2	Conflict between Academic Staff and the Government	400	216	54.00	184	46.00
3	Conflict between non-teaching staff and the professional administrator	400	266	66.50	134	33.50
4	Conflict between students and the university administrators	400	213	53.25	187	46.75
5	Conflict between non-teaching staff and the Government	400	315	78.75	85	21.25
6	Conflict between students and the Government	400	216	54.00	184	46.00
7	Inter-personal conflict among staff	400	295	73.75	105	26.25
8	Inter-personal conflict among students	400	308	77.00	92	23.00
9	Conflict between academic staff and students	400	341	85.25	59	14.75

10	Conflict between students and the host community	400	150	37.50	250	62.50
11	Conflict between Academic staff union and non academic staff union	400	209	52.25	191	47.75
	Mean	400	267	66.80	133	33.20

Result in Table 1 showed the percentage and the mean scores value for the most common types of role conflict between professional and academic administrators of south-west Nigeria universities. It revealed that conflict frequently exists between Academic and professional administrators. This was with percentage of 77.25%, conflict between Non-teaching staff and the Government was frequent. This was with 78.75%. Conflict between Academic staff and students was also frequent with 82.25% and 66.8% between unions. Whereas conflict between students and the host community was rare 62.5% was recorded.

The most common types of conflict were vividly shown in Table 1. Some of them were, interpersonal conflict among staff, conflict between non-teaching staff and Government, students and Academic staff, Academic staff and professional administrators.

Research Question Two: What are the major causes of role conflict between professional and academic in selected universities in Nigeria?

Table 2:- Causes of conflict between professional and Academic Administrators in selected universities in the south-west Nigeria.

S/N	Items	N	Strongly agree	%	Disagree	%
1	Non payment of salaries as at when due	400	312	78.00	88	22.00
2	Sudden change in University Policies	400	262	65.50	138	34.50
3	Imposition of decisions on employees by Professional administrators	400	308	77.00	92	23.00
4	Inadequate provision of physical amenities such as electricity and water	400	253	63.25	147	36.75
5	Denials of right and privileges	400	280	70.00	120	30.00
6	Non implementation of Government circular on staff welfare	400	317	79.25	83	20.75
7	Allegation of Corruption against university professional administrators	400	267	66.75	133	33.25
8	Communication gap between professional administrators and Academic	400	306	76.50	94	23.50
9	Improper power assignment	400	283	70.75	117	29.25
10	Refusal of management to honour agreement reached with workers union	400	380	95.00	20	5.00
11	Miscomprehension of duties	400	310	77.50	90	22.50
12.	Discriminatory application of University rules and regulations	400	296	74.00	104	26.00
	Mean	400	298	74.50	102	25.50

The result in Table 2, showed that means score values for the major causes of conflict in selected universities. All the respondents both academic and professional administrators strongly agree to all the 12 items to be the major causes of conflict in the Universities. Refusal of management to honour agreement reached with workers union was the highest 95% respectively.

Research Question Three: What are the consequences of conflict in selected universities in Nigeria?

Table 3:-Consequences of conflict in south-west universities:-

S/N	Items	N	Strongly agree	%	Disagree	%
1	Low Productivity among staff	400	373	93.25	27	6.75
2	Inability to achieve the goals and objectives of the institution	400	181	45.25	219	54.75
3	Closing down of universities	400	363	90.75	37	9.25
4	Loss of lives and property	400	210	52.50	190	47.50
5	Suspension or dismissal of staff and students found guilty	400	302	75.50	98	24.50
6	Delay in promotion of staff	400	365	91.25	35	8.75
7	Delay in payment of salaries	400	213	53.25	187	46.75
8	Disruption of academic calendar in the universities	400	246	61.50	154	38.50
	Mean	400	282	70.40	118	29.60

Table 3: consequences of conflict in South-West. Nigeria Universities. The result in table 3 showed that conflict resulted in low productivity of staff, (93.25%), closing down of Universities (90.25%) dismissal of staff and students found guilty (75.5%) and Delay in promotion of staff (91.25%). While (47.5%) disagree with loss of lives and property 46.75% disagree with delay in payment of salaries. All these no doubt will affect the smooth running of the university.

Research Question four: What are the most commonly used strategy in managing conflict in selected universities in Nigeria?

Table 4:-Most effective management strategies of resolving conflict between Professional administrators and Academic in south-west Nigerian universities.

S/N	Items	N	S.A	%	Disagree	%
1	Dialogue Strategy	400	312	78.00	88	22.00
2	Prevention Strategy	400	260	65.00	140	35.00
3	Mediation Strategy	400	270	67.50	130	32.50
4	Avoidance Strategy	400	109	27.25	291	72.75
5	Participatory Decision making	400	294	73.50	106	26.50
6	Emergency Strategy	400	140	35.00	260	65.00
7	Use of Ad-hoc Committee	400	203	50.75	197	49.25
8	Persuasion Strategy	400	215	53.75	185	46.25
	Mean	400	225	56.30	175	43.70

Table 4 showed that dialogue strategy recorded 78% mediation strategy 67.5%. participatory decision making 73.5%. These strongly agreed to by both respondents while emergency strategy and avoidance strategy were disagreed with by both respondents.

Research Question Five: What are the most effective management strategies for minimizing conflict in the selected universities.

S/N	Items	Agree	Highly effective	%	Moderately ineffective	%	Ineffective	%
1	Dialogue	400	72	18.00	305	76.2	23	5.75
2	Force Strategy	400	80	20.00	140	35.00	180	45.00
3	Emergency Strategy	400	72	18.00	150	37.50	178	44.50
4	Mediation Strategy	400	90	22.50	290	72.50	20	5.00
5	Prevention Strategy	400	84	21.00	260	65.00	56	14.00
6	Participatory Decision	400	90	22.50	255	63.75	55	13.75
7	Avoidance Strategy	400	83	20.75	217	54.25	100	25.00
8	Ad-hoc Committee	400	93	23.25	203	50.75	104	26.00
	Mean	400	83	20.75	215	53.75	102	25.50

Table 5 showed that none of the conflict management strategies was highly effective in managing conflict in the universities. The dialogue strategy that was found in this study to be most commonly used in managing conflict was however found to be moderately effective. 305 (76.2%). The next one was participatory decision making 255 (63.75%). Ineffective strategy was the force strategy 180 (45%) followed by emergency strategy 44.5%. mediation strategy with (72.5%) and Prevention strategy 65% were all moderately effective strategies in resolving conflict in an organization.

Discussion of Results

Some of the most common types of conflict found in this study include conflict between academic and university administrators, Non-teaching Staff and University administrators, Academic Staff Union and Government , Academic Union and Professional administrators. The most common causes of conflict found in this study include communication gap. This was in agreement with the work of Alade (1998), who pointed out that effective communication channel was vital to an organisation and that the continuous healthy existence of any organisation depends on how well its communication channels operate.

Other major causes of conflict were non implementation of government circular on staff welfare and miscomprehension of duties between Academic and professional administrator. Duties and roles of university officers should be well defined. Each officer should know his expected roles and his boundaries and limitations. This would reduce the frictions that often arise from miscomprehension of leadership roles task performance and task expectations.

One of the most effective strategies for resolving conflict is dialogue between the two parties involved finding out the root cause of role conflict and removing it. This

finding agreed with Olulade (2005) who asserted that a thorough diagnosis of conflict usually leads to the best possible solution for all the parties involved in conflict.

Participatory decision making strategy was also seen as a way of resolving conflict. In this way the interests and concerns of parties involved in a role conflict will be well integrated. The problem-solver is people oriented and a good listener who love others intensely and constantly working to help others make considerable progress with little concern for self. All the strategies found in this study to be moderately effective in managing conflict tallied with those enumerated by Ootobo (2007).

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that role conflict occurred between academic staff and professional administrators in South-West Universities because of inadequate communication, denial of rights and privileges, power tussles, personality clashes, and poor management strategies.

It was also discovered that one of the moderately effective strategies for the avoidance and resolution of conflict was through dialogue, ascertaining the root cause of conflict and removing it through dialogue. It was therefore recommended that university authorities should adopt the strategies found in this study to be moderately effective in managing conflict in the Universities.

Also universities constitution, laws and regulations should be made available to both academic and professional administrators and all staff so as to avoid communication gap and conflict within the system.

The academic and professional administrator should continue to demonstrate spirit of tolerance so as to ensure the smooth running of the University. Simple conflict situation should not be allowed to generate into crisis.

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