



CONFLICT MANAGEMENT PRACTICES EMPLOYED BY PRINCIPALS FOR QUALITY SERVICE DELIVERY IN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN RIVERS STATE

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ABSTRACT

This study assessed the conflict management practices employed by secondary school principals for quality service in secondary schools in Rivers State. One research question guided the study and one hypothesis was formulated and tested at a 0.05 level of significance. The sample for the study was 780 made up of 130 principals and 650 teachers. A questionnaire instrument designed by the researchers titled "Conflict Management Practices Questionnaire" (CMPQ) was used for data collection. The questionnaire was structured on a four-point scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagreed (SD) weighted 4, 3, 2, and 1. Cronbach's alpha method was used to ascertain the internal consistency of the instrument and this yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.81. Mean was used to answer the research question while a t-test was used to test the hypothesis. A mean rating of 2.50 and above was interpreted as agreeing while a mean rating of less than 2.50 was interpreted as disagree. The null hypothesis was rejected where the calculated t-value was greater than critical values (1.96) whereas the null hypothesis was not rejected where the calculated t-values were less than the critical value. Out of 780 copies of the instrument administered, 751 copies were retrieved and used for data analysis. The findings of the study indicated that principals and teachers agree that principals employ the avoidance principle of conflict management by posting conflicting parties to different areas to avoid clashes.

KEYWORDS

Conflict, management, conflict management, quality service delivery.



INTRODUCTION

The complex nature of the educational establishment makes it possible for people with different backgrounds in terms of needs, goals, skills, talents, status, competencies, knowledge, perception, temperament, and so on to be members of the school system. Teachers and pupils which constitute educational input in the school system come from different backgrounds and have different need-dispositions. Their need-dispositions are sometimes at variance with the goals of the school. Under such state of diversity, operation of the school system cannot be devoid of conflict. This is because individuals or groups are sometimes bound to disagree on issues.

Conflict is one of the odds that many good people try to avoid in every situation but unfortunately, it is one of the human attributes that is unavoidable. Even animals disagree among themselves, quarrel and settle cases though in their own way. Where there are two or more persons staying or working together, conflict abounds. In the homes, markets, schools, hospitals, industries name them there must be conflicts. The conflict could be among staffers, staff and the managers and so on. Since conflict is inevitable in human life, the resolution becomes very active word that determines the gravity of the damages done by conflict. It could emanate from little misunderstanding or misconception and when there is no early intervention or not well resolved could escalate to the point of jeopardising the progress of an establishment.

Conflict is the clash or encounter one has with another whom they have common function to perform or people who share a common place. Conflict is not an individualistic affair, it could be a group affair too and the aftermath can be very devastating just as Ntuno (2014) in Ntuno& Yusuf (2020) rightly stressed that conflict being an unfriendly experience could lead to interruption of teaching/learning experiences and obliteration of school facilities if left unaddressed. Notre Dame University was in agreement with the above avowal and declared that conflict resolution is a necessity in any organization and worried that when conflict is left unresolved, quality service delivery which team work begets goes into oblivion. It is an established fact that conflict is part of human life, which could begin as a mere argument or exchange of words to ease of anger/tension. When a teacher is not comfortable with the colleague's behaviour or utterances (teacher versus teacher) or teacher not contented with principal's directives and things like that conflicts could emerge. The management of these conflicts is imperative as it dictates whether the resolution would result to enhanced work performance or disruptive school activities that negate educational objectives. This is the reason for ascertaining principals' management practices with regard to existing conflicts in schools which is eminent.

Concept of Conflict

The word conflict is an integral part of human existence. It is a natural occurrence wherever more than one person coexists. It is a form of disagreement or quarrelling caused by misunderstanding, ineffective communication or idle gossip. It is human oriented which if deferred could breed rancour, chaos and disharmony among the concerned individuals thus encumbers positive results in any organization/institution. Conflict is prominent in marriage institutions, educational institutions, financial institution and communities name them. In support of the above expressions, Knard cited by Madumere-Obike (2011) espoused that "wherever individuals with varying needs, values and personalities come together within an organizational structure, conflict is inevitable and depending on the manager's response, the outcome may stifle group and individual growth".

In her own submission, Okorie (2009) lucidly put that conflict materialise when there is deviation from the expectations the workforce received from the holders of official positions. Using the school setting for instance, conflict occurs when there is contradiction from the Principals' roles to either the teachers, parents, students or the school communities. It follows that people expect a normal flow of organization daily routing and cannot afford to allow irregularities from the superordinate, colleagues, and the students. The Principal who understands this concept stands the chance of minimizing conflict situations in school milieu. Conflict as a natural phenomenon could be minimized but cannot be eradicated. This could be achieved by ensuring that the work ethics are strictly maintained and favouritism expunged in order to reduce incidences of conflict situations that could hamper the institutional goals as well as that of the individuals.

Management of Conflict in Schools

Conflict management is the application of the management principles in handling conflict related cases in the operation of schools. The school principals has the duty to plan, organize, coordinate and direct both the human and non-human resources efficiently and effectively for the organization of school goals while ensuring that the staff work harmoniously of the aforementioned goals must be accomplished. Conflict management is the ability to recognise and resolve conflicts amicably, as well as being firm and fair in that act. This singular act of resolution by the manager is highly sensitive as it commands the extent of goal accomplishment. In the same vein, Valamis (2020) succinctly put that conflict management is the strategic way of settling dispute among people thus reduce undesirable results while positive results are extolled. Obviously, conflict management involves being creative and thoughtful so as not to allow protracted conflict which is capable of wrecking-havoc in a work place.

Conflict Management Practices

As there are varying degrees of conflicts, so there are many ways of handling such scores to ensure peaceful co-existence which is needed in all work places be it education or otherwise. This is necessitated by the untold setbacks of conflicts in achieving institutional objectives as well as ensuring quality output. Consequently, Prause&Mujtaba (2015) recognized five conflict management strategies namely;

1. Competing; this is the exertion of authority in conflict resolution process. This could drastically affect the organization functioning as the aggrieved party may no longer be cooperative in carrying out the assigned duties. This is referred to as win/lose and it is adopted where possible strategies have been exhausted.
2. Accommodating; this is the type of conflict management that relies on neglect of the feeling of one of the parties whose interest was not favoured in the process. This practice more often than not emanates from the warring parties in which case one of them is more knowledgeable in the particular area and inspired the spirit of cooperation among them. This is a lose/win approach.
3. Avoiding; this is the situation whereby one of the parties remains mute owing to lack of interest in the outcome of the conflict management practices. The person remains passive believing that the situation will subside and forgotten. This strategy is also known as lose/lose technique. Portland Community College (2020) citing Thomas-Kilmann Model of conflict resolution reaffirmed that avoiding principle has to do with person(s) who belief that time

will tell. This person is of the view that by staying out of the troubled area for a while could aid in the resolution of the conflict.

4. Collaborating: this technique is a participatory one in which case all concerned converge to ensure that everybody's interest is covered during the resolution. This strategy is thus referred to as "win win" as there is no victor no vanquished.
5. Compromising; this is the practice that indulges in the partial settling of conflict. None of the opposing parties is fully contented. This aspect of technique lasts for a short while and the conflict will resurface. This is a case of win/lose construct.

The scholars further posited that conflict management practices could be categorized into three major classes namely,

- i. Integration which refers to working with people
- ii. Distributive which deals with working against people
- iii. Avoidance which involves working away from other people.

On the other hand, Portland Community College (2020) on Thomas-Kilmann model espoused that the five models could broadly grouped into two viz.;

- i. Assertiveness and
- ii. Cooperativeness;

Assertiveness is the act of taking decision in resolving conflict to mollify ones' desires while cooperativeness is the act to sooth other people's requests. Succinctly put, the former is selfish while the latter is selfless.

Following the need to settling official score for effective job performance, Notre Dame University lucidly put that conflict is better settled in line with the following procedures;

- a) Give the parties audience before employing the conflict management techniques; Fair hearing is prioritized as it not only ease off tension on the part of the contending parties but also gives the hearer good take off.
- b) The warring groups should be brought together to meet and discuss the issue as stake; this affords all the people concerned to air their mind and the hearer to understand the root cause and determine how to handle the matter to the best interest of all concerned.
- c) Be an impartial judge; fairness and equity is the watchword. Taking sides in conflict management could be very disastrous in achieving the institutional aims and objectives.
- d) Do not postpone conflict resolution; conflict is such an unfriendly situation that delay could be dangerous. Postponement of conflict could deteriorate to more deadly situations like destruction of life and properties.
- e) Promote team work; inspiring and appealing teamwork is of paramount importance as it fortifies the spirit of oneness and cooperation among staffers which are needed in organization for transformational agenda.
- f) Broadcast praise; admiration as a means of positive reinforcement should be done in the open to the hearing of the other members of staff so as to stimulate others in doing that which demands such recommendation.

Obviously, the main reason for adoption of conflict management strategies in work places such as schools is anchored on the fact that the school principal whose duty it is to ensure maximum cooperation of the school human elements in other to achieve educational objectives should be

desirous to weed any obstacle that could hamper the pre-determined goals. This is quintessential because he takes the responsibility of the success and failure of the school organization.

Types of Conflicts

Conflicts occur between different levels of people working in an organization just as enshrined in the institutional organogram. In congruence with the above view point, Eriega (2010) opined that conflicts exist in six levels depending on its originality namely; Intra-personal, inter-personal, intra-group, inter-group, intra-organizational and inter-organizational.

1. Intra-personal conflict: this type of conflict is an internal one. It affects an individual as a person does not concern a second person, it is a personal conflict. It deals with achievement of irreconcilable objectives and as such is referred to as goal conflict. It is believed that for any decision one makes there is a conflict. Decision making generates intra-personal conflict. This goal conflict has three approaches namely;
 - a) Approach-approach conflict; this is the circumstances where a person is stimulated to approach a goal and at the same enthused to avoid it. The individual is stimulated to reached out for the goal or let it be simultaneously. The choice being made is between two desirable options. It is likened to having two good jobs and deciding which one to accept.
 - b) Approach-avoidance conflict: this is a type of conflict that one must choose between options with both desirable and undesirable features. In this type of conflict, the goal to be met has both positive and negative consequences which breed approach and avoidance reactions (a state of indecision).
 - c) Avoidance-avoidance conflict: this is when an individual is motivated to evade more than one mutually exclusive goals. An example is choosing between being sacked or accepting salary cut.

There is another distinctive aspect of intra-personal conflict known as role conflict. This is evinced in a situation whereby a single person plays different roles like a mother, banker, dancer, church usher and so on. This person is also expected to have inter role conflict with the colleagues.

2. Inter-personal conflict: this describes the type of conflict between two or more persons. It occurs as a result of misconception, arguments and misunderstanding among others.
3. Intra-group conflict: this deals with arguments or misunderstanding within a particular group. It be among teaching staff as a group debating on how best to curb examination irregularities or organize the prize-giving day.
4. Inter-group conflict: this type of conflict between two or more groups. In the school setting, it could be among tutorial and non-tutorial staffs or between various departments in an organization.
5. Intra-organizational conflict: this is a kind of conflict obtainable in a single organization. In this regard, conflict could be horizontal, vertical and diagonal. Vertical conflicts occur between supervisors and subordinates, managers and subordinates, horizontal conflicts happens among employees or between departments, diagonal conflict involves allocation of resources for production. It affects every dick and harry in the organizational set up.
6. Inter-organizational conflicts deal with two or more different organisations.

In all of these conflicts, the workforce could be inspired or fortified after the resolution to attain greater height in the same it could diminish or encumber organisational goals. It all depends on how the man at the helm of affairs handles the conflict resolution strategies. In secondary schools, the above discussed conflict situations are eminent and could result to poor quality educational services if not diligently handled. It could also foster better academic achievement when handled with care, equity and fairness.

Statement of the Problem

Research has shown that many school principals take sides in resolving conflicts among staff, staff and students and even among students which seems to have negatively affected the quality of educational delivery process. For instance in Rivers State, many good teachers have resorted to seeking transfer or even abandoning their teaching profession as a result of the way and manner many school principals ignore conflicts in schools leaving the affected person(s) to their faith. This has triggered a lot of actions on the part of the school principals who equally issue warning and queries to the wrong person(s) in the bid to favour a particular sect or person(s). In the midst of these upheavals, teaching and learning suffers a huge set back. There is therefore need that conflicts in the school be managed constructively in order for it not to escalate and consequently interfere with the teaching and learning process.

Research Question

What are the conflict management practices employed by secondary school principals in Rivers State?

Hypothesis

There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of the principals and teachers on the conflict management practices employed by secondary school principals in Rivers State.

Methodology

The study utilized the descriptive survey design. One research questions guided the study and one corresponding null hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance. The study sample was 780 made up of 130 principals and 650 teachers in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. A researchers' developed instrument titled "Conflict Management Practices Questionnaire" (CMPQ) which was validated by three experts was used for data collection. The questionnaire was structured on a four point scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A) Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagreed (SD) weighted 4, 3, 2 and 1. Cronbach's Alpha method was used to ascertain the internal consistency of the instrument and this yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.81. Mean was used to answer the research question while t-test was used to test the hypothesis. A mean rating of 2.50 and above was interpreted as agree while mean rating of less than 2.50 was interpreted as disagree. The null hypothesis was rejected where the calculated the t-value was greater than critical values (1.96) whereas the null hypothesis was not rejected where the calculated t-values was less than the critical value. Out of 780 copies of instrument administered, 751 copies were retrieved and used for data analysis.

Results

Table1: Mean Ratings Of Principals and Teachers On the Conflict Management Practices Employed By Secondary School Principals in the Rivers State.

S/N	Items	Principals			Teachers		
		Mean	SD	Remark	Mean	SD	Remark
1.	Conflict is resolved by compelling one party to endure.	2.44	.53	Disagree	2.82	.53	Agree
2.	Conflicting persons are posted to different areas to avoid clashes.	2.82	.56	Agree	3.04	.56	Agree
3.	Conflicting parties are asked to concede some aspects of their desires so that solution can be reached.	2.27	.65	Disagree	2.53	.65	Agree
4.	The needs and wants of each party is given adequate consideration.	2.61	.55	Agree	2.41	.55	Disagree
5.	Parties are encouraged to forgo personal interest for others interests	3.03	.57	Agree	2.26	.57	Disagree

Table 2: t-test Comparison of Principals and Teachers Mean Ratings on the Conflict Management Practices Employed by Principals Secondary School Principals in Rivers State.

Source of variation	N	Mean	SD	df	t-cal	t-crit	Decision
Principals	130	2.61	.57	749	.45	1.96	Not-Sig
Teachers	621	2.52	.97				

The results in table 2 shows that the mean for principal ($M=2.61$, $SD=.57$) was not significantly greater than that of the teachers ($M=2.52$, $SD=.97$); $t(749) = .45$. The null hypothesis of no significant difference between the two groups was therefore not rejected.

Discussion of Findings

The findings obtained indicated that the principals agree they employ conflict management practices such as posting conflicting parties to other areas to avoid clashes, giving adequate consideration to the needs of each, encouraging parties to forgo personal interest for others interests. Teachers on the other hand agree that principals resolved conflict by compelling one party to endure, conflicting parties are posted to different areas to avoid clashes and are also asked to concede some aspects of their desires so that solution can be reached.

In conflict resolution, avoidance and accommodation create room for the conflict to resurface in the near future which may adversely affect not only the individuals but also the organizational goals. This is what prompted Portland Community College (2020) citing Thomas-kilmann Model of conflict resolution to emphasize that conflict is better settled amicably early enough because delay

could lead to devastating effects. Similarly, Valamis (2020) reiterated that avoidance principle of management could merely incubate the conflict to a more serious level. Ntunocited in Ntuno and Yusuf (2020) asserted that conflict is an unfriendly experience which could lead to disruption of teaching/learning behaviours and possible leads to destruction of school facilities thereby prohibiting quality educational delivery process. Conflict could inspire the workforce and it could still retard the progress of the school when the principal is not knowledgeable conflict management practices to employ at any given circumstance.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, the researchers concluded that secondary schools principals in Rivers State employ avoidance conflict management practice in the administration of school. There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of principals and teachers on the conflict management practices employed secondary school principals in Rivers State.

Recommendation

Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended that there is need for the secondary school management board in Rivers State to sensitize principals on various conflict management strategies and how they can be employed to resolve different levels of conflicts emanating within the school. This will help reduce the conflict situation in secondary schools in Rivers State.

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