



Nigerian university system and conflict management

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Abstract

Conflict is an inevitable part of human contact; nonetheless, good conflict management and transformation are critical for human society's peace and prosperity. Nigerian universities have been plagued by crises for decades, ranging from academic staff vs. university administrators, students vs. academic staff, students against. University authorities, and non-academic personnel vs. university administrators, to name a few. Professionals and academics have become distrustful and hostile as a result of the disagreements, which has hampered the smooth, effective, and efficient management of institutions. Despite this, it appeared that educational stakeholders had developed a nonchallant attitude toward these issues. If this role conflict is not addressed, it may be both descriptive and negative, since the persons involved will frequently regard one other as adversaries. This is unfit for the University community and the Nigerian educational system in general. This article looked at dispute resolution in higher education institutions, with a focus on Nigerian universities. Some sources of conflict have been recognized, as well as strategies for resolving them. There were also well-crafted recommendations on how conflict should be better managed in order to meet the system's mission, goals, and objectives, particularly the pursuit of industrial harmony in the system.

Keywords: conflict, conflict management, university system, violence, collective bargaining

Introduction

The university's nature and character as an academic organization necessitates the creation and maintenance of a harmonious environment conducive to the collaboration of various groups of employees and the management team in order to achieve predetermined missions and objectives. However, in recent years, the Nigerian University system's industrial relations landscape has been flooded with a series of industrial conflicts, posing challenges to knowledge advancement (Ajayi, Modupe, 2000) [4].

Today's organizations are rife with conflict. This is especially true in an organization like a university, which has a structure that allows two or more units or groups to work together across functional lines to achieve its goals. People of various personalities - students, lecturers, and administrative staff - must work together harmoniously in universities. As a result, the organizational structure is such that functional boundaries of knowledge exchange exist between staff and staff, students and students, and staff and students.

Conflicts will inevitably arise, but a well-managed conflict will not turn violent. Since

Many of the conflicts in tertiary institutions and insecurity devolved because their antecedents (causes) were not properly managed or the conflicting parties did not explore the power of communication and the personality of the conflict manager in resolving the crises (Agbonna; Yusuf & Onifade, 2009) [3].

Nigerian universities have been plagued by crises for decades, ranging from academic staff vs. university administrators, students vs. academic staff, students vs. university authorities, and non-academic staff vs. university authorities. administrators. Professionals and academics have become distrustful and hostile as a result of the conflicts, which has hampered the smooth, effective, and efficient administration of universities. Despite this, it appeared that educational stakeholders had developed a nonchallant attitude toward these conflicts. If this role conflict is not addressed, it can be both descriptive and negative, as the people involved will frequently see each other as adversaries. This is unfit for the University community and the Nigerian educational system in general.

This paper investigates conflict and conflict resolution in higher education institutions, with a focus on Nigerian universities. Some sources of conflict are identified, and methods for resolving them are considered.

Conceptual Underpinnings

Many people regard conflict as a nearly entirely negative activity with no redeeming qualities. Some people think of it as both dysfunctional and destructive, as well as a catalyst for change, creativity, and production (Posigha & Oghuvwu, 2009) [18].

The term "conflict" refers to a situation in which two parties are at odds (Amusan, 1996). As a result, a conflict situation is defined as the inability of those involved to resolve their differences and come to an agreement on issues of mutual interest. This inability manifests itself in various forms of protest, including strikes and other

work disruptions (slow-downs, sabotage and planned absenteeism). Conflict was also defined by Ejiogu (1990)^[5] as mutual hostility and all types of opposition or antagonistic interaction, such as disagreements or controversies over ideas, values, and ways of life. Ejiogu (1990)^[5] Identified the following major types of conflicts:

1. Conflict arising from a hierarchy of positions
 - a. subordinate conflict - between the boss and his subordinate (for example, between lecturers and students);
 - b. superordinate conflict - between the administrator and an authority over him (for example, between the Vice Chancellor and the Visitor);
 - c. lateral conflict - between an administrator and his peer (for example, between the Vice Chancellors of two universities);
2. Conflict based on the relationship between the objective state of affairs and how conflicting parties perceive it (the conflict could be veridical, contingent, displaced, misattributed, or latent).
3. Conflicts arising from antagonistic sources such as cultural values versus institutional expectations, role expectations versus personality roles, and conflicts arising from personality discord.

Organizational conflict is defined as behavior that is intended to obstruct the accomplishment of another person's objectives. As a result of the incompatibility of goals, conflict arises from opposing behaviors. It can be viewed from the perspective of an individual, a group, or an organization. Mullins (1999)^[15] identified three potential sources of internal conflict in organizations. They are as follows:

1. Personal characteristics, such as attitude, personality traits, needs, illness, and stress.
2. Group - group skills, informal organization, and group norms are all examples of this.
3. Organizational factors, such as communication, authority structure, leadership style, and management behavior.

Individual sources of conflict frequently develop into groups as well as organizational conflict, so we must be aware of this. The nature of the union leader will determine to a large extent the achievement of the union's demand, based on the potential sources mentioned above.

The organization's management styles will then determine whether the conflict is subdued or aggravated, for example. To achieve his objectives, an autocratic leader will use coercion rather than persuasion. If the Union Leaders are of the caliber of Karl Marx's ideologues who believed in radicalism, the organization risks falling off the cliff.

In many cases, a lack of synchronization of individual goals with organizational goals can lead to an individual working against the organization's corporate goals. There is also departmental conflict, which can obstruct a department's ability to achieve the organizational goals it requires. Organizations that ignore the existence of informal groups risk becoming stranded. Individual union members' complaints about job content may also be taken up by a union. When a union believes a member is being overworked, the union may file a grievance on behalf of the employee, and the organization's refusal to budge to the union's threat may result in a higher level of conflict.

Conflict, according to Robins (1998), is a positive force that is required for effective performance. This approach promotes a low level of conflict within the group in order to promote self-criticism, change, and innovation, as well as to avoid apathy or an excessive tolerance for harmony and the status quo. Conflict is an unavoidable part of working life, and it should be judged on its own merits.

The modern world is becoming increasingly multicultural, and the resulting identity crisis sometimes jeopardizes long-term human development. As a result, promoting understanding and dialogue is a critical component of multiculturalism, global peace, and security management (Oloyede, 1999)^[16]. Conflict is an unavoidable part of any business.

Conflict resolution that is efficient and effective is critical to the development of any society, but the current situation in Nigerian universities is the polar opposite of this reality. Conflict is unavoidable in higher education. At every level of our academic world, there is conflict. While conflict can be negative and cause deep rifts in an institution's framework, it can also be used to move the institution and its people from stagnation to a new level of effectiveness. The ability to manage conflict is what makes the difference (Holton, 1998)^[8].

The value of tertiary education in the development of a country cannot be overstated. According to Fatile & Adejuwon (2011)^[7], no meaningful development can take place in a crisis-ridden system torn apart by crisis, as seen in the country's educational institutions today. Students' problems are as old as Nigeria's tertiary institutions, according to experience. Students' militancy in the country's tertiary institutions has become a major source of concern.

Revolts, protests, unrests, and violence, as well as months-long school closures in the aftermath of unrest, have become a regular feature of Nigerian tertiary institutions (Adeyemi; Ekundayo & Alonge, 2010)^[2].

Conflict arises when people interact in the context of incompatible goals, and one's ability to meet those goals is dependent on the choices, decisions, and actions of others. As a result, conflict can be said to be endemic to human relationships and societies. It is the result of human interaction, an unavoidable byproduct of choices and decisions, and a manifestation of the fundamental fact of human interdependence (Adejuwon & Okewale, 2009)^[1].

On campus, conflicts are increasing in number, type, and complexity. The current university environment is unquestionably more difficult than in the past. The scope of conflicts and the forums available to manage them is much broader than it has ever been. In short, society has changed, and the university has changed as well.

There are basically four forms of conflict. Intra-personal, Inter-personal, Intergroup 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 other people or groups, but it remains an intrapersonal problem until the hostile feelings are addressed. A person's role in an organization may conflict with that of another person, individuals, or groups, as a result of the responsibilities entrusted to them. Roles conflicts arise as a result of role ambiguity, which occurs when people are unclear about what they expect of each other or of others, when roles are not clearly defined and individuals' or groups' responsibilities are not clearly stated. As a result of role ambiguity, workers may be unable to build up expectations of one another (Olutade 2005) ^[17].

Causes of Conflicts

Within the university system, there are numerous potential sources of conflict. The following are a few of them: Competition for scarce resources is never-ending: Research, teaching, student amenities, staff pay, and other welfare services are all competing for the university's limited resources. As a result, there is a deprivation (relative or absolute) of all of the system's needs. The decay of structures and the decline of services and functions are the results of insufficient financial resources being provided to the university system. Sanda (1992) claims that there is a direct link between deprivation, which leads to frustration, and aggression.

Perceived goal incompatibility: When groups or individuals perceive and interpret the same phenomenon differently, the risk of conflict is high. The critical point of contact between the teacher and the learner must be prioritized in the university system.

Students will not learn well unless they are actively involved in the process and accept responsibility for their learning activities, according to learning psychology. Much else will be forgiven if students truly believe they are learning. If they are not, they must be listened to; otherwise, they will engage in other activities that they deem worthwhile.

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Despite the fact that a university is an academic enterprise, much of its academic effectiveness is dependent on administrative support machinery. As a result, regardless of the origin of the conflict, the management competencies of university managers determine the severity of conflicts within the university to a large extent (internal or external). Managers who have authoritarian or dogmatic tendencies are particularly prone to conflict. In university administration, there are eight spheres that must be addressed in order to achieve the goal of providing high-quality education (Sanda, 1991) ^[20]. Finances, students, academic programs, committee systems, personnel, welfare, reward systems, and physical facilities are among these spheres. Any major lapse (s) in any of these areas could spark a revolt. Role Uncertainty/Dissatisfaction, when role prescriptions are vague and uncertain, conflicts arise.

Differences in values and lifestyles: Probably due to the large number of young adolescents, many of whom are experiencing freedom and independence for the first time, the university has a diverse set of values and lifestyles.

Noise, aggressive dress styles, sexual behaviors, aesthetics, and secret peer associations are all present on campuses and pose a threat (e.g. cultism). Rules and regulations are imposed by the older members, who are academics and administrators. The young may retaliate by demanding and claiming their democratic rights, resulting in minor clashes or even heinous skirmishes between students and university authorities.

Politics and national issues: Some conflicts arise due to political objectives outside the university, in addition to conflicts arising from situations within the university. Conflicts between the university and the government arise as a result of political control of education in terms of financial and administrative policies. The Federal Government controls the structure, curriculum, budget, and calendar of universities through the Federal Ministry of Education and the National Universities Commission (NUC). All university admissions are also controlled and manipulated through the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) (Quota system). Furthermore, national issues, particularly those with political overtones, can lead to conflict. Privatization, university autonomy, and democratization of university management are all controversial policies. Conflicts arise as a result of politics, particularly on campus, regarding the appointment of key officers such as the Vice Chancellor. Academic activities and university calendars are frequently disrupted as a result of these conflicts.

Work interdependence, differences in performance criteria and reward systems, differences in unit and subunit orientation and goals, and differences in status and jurisdictional ambiguities are all causes of role conflict in universities. Differences in background, personal traits, values, communication, perceptions, attitudes, and emotions are all examples of personal or behavioral differences.

4. Possible Ways of Managing Conflicts in Nigerian Universities

Conflict resolution that is efficient and effective is critical to the development of any society, but the current situation in Nigeria is the polar opposite of this reality. The best approach to resolving conflict at the university is to manage conflict toward proactive and constructive action. When conflict arises, we must be able to effectively manage it so that it becomes a positive rather than a negative force that threatens the individual or group. If conflicts arise and are not properly managed, they will cause delays in work, disinterest, and lack of action, and in the worst-case scenario, the system will completely fail.

The development of a constructive communication process and the personality of an influential conflict negotiator are critical in resolving university conflict. Although schools cannot avoid conflict, much of it can be managed and guided away from disrupting school efforts to achieve its manifest and latent goals if the conflicting parties are systematic in how they communicate their grievances, the state of the conflict, and their willingness to negotiate for peace, and if the negotiator mediating the resolution process has a positive personality (Agbonna; Yusuf & Onifade, 2009) ^[3].

In order to manage conflict in schools, the school administrator or chief executive must have the right leadership style.

Leadership and administrative skills are still crucial. Conflict resolution is likely to be aided by a more participatory and supportive leadership and management style. Demers outlined three strategies for peaceful conflict resolution between and among warring parties in Magaula (2007): mediation, arbitration, and reconciliation. Magagula (2007) ^[14] also argued that universities could use each of Demers' approaches to resolve crises among and between aggrieved parties.

Goals and objectives must also be clearly defined. Goals and objectives, role definitions, and performance standards should all be clarified and refined on a regular basis to avoid misunderstandings and conflicts.

Focusing on superordinate goals that are shared by all parties in a conflict can also help to defuse hostility and encourage more cooperative behavior. Providing accurate information and a forum for people to express their opinions is required to prevent communication flow from being obstructed, it's possible that this will lead to a difference in perceptions. An effective management information system (MIS) is required to provide the necessary information while minimizing delays and maximizing resource utilization. For capturing, processing, storing, retrieving, and disseminating relevant information, most Nigerian universities lack an effective computerized management information system (Alabi, 2002).

There is a need for better communication and collaboration between the university system and the government as a whole. Decision-makers and their advisers need to learn more about how universities work, and the university community needs to learn more about government procedures in general. Universities will never develop attitudes of hostility or servility toward the government, and the government will never be intolerant of universities.

Ibukun (1997) ^[11] identified some conflict resolution strategies, including the use of authority and command, problem solving, appealing to higher-level organizational goals, reorganizing the organization, prevention and avoidance, expanding opportunities and resources, compromise and agreement, and changing the behavior of people involved in conflict through dialogue.

Conclusion

The potential for conflict in universities is diverse. As a result, all groups within the system must recognize these potentials and make deliberate, concerted efforts to reduce conflict's negative consequences. Meaningful interactions and effective communication, resourcefulness and resource management, and collaboration between universities and the state could all help to achieve this reduction. All of these measures would result in a significant reduction in negative conflict potential and, as a result, a high potential for goal achievement.

Recommendations

The following are some worthwhile strategies for future conflict resolution in Nigerian universities:

- In the event of a labor dispute, the personalities involved in union activities should not be attacked; instead, the problem should be the focus.
- Rather than using coercion, such as a sign-back register, management should allow for bargaining.
- Consideration of a wide range of alternative solutions, a cooperative climate, an organized and orderly process, and avoidance of artificial conflict-reducing devices such as voting or relying on a leader to make the final decision are all conditions that promote effective conflict management.
- As a result, conflict management should not be construed as a one-size-fits-all approach that applies to all situations; rather, it should entail a series of coordinated efforts to prevent and/or mitigate a potentially serious crisis.

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