

Organizational Conflict And Innovation As Strategy For Employee Performance

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Abstract

The research examined organizational conflict and innovation as strategy for employee performance. The aim of the study was to examine the concept of conflict, dimensions of conflict, types of organisational conflict, causes of organizational conflict, sources of organizational conflict, stages of organizational conflict, role of organizational conflict, strategies for managing organizational conflict and effect of conflict on employees' performance. The study further revealed that organizational conflict could arise from poor management, communication gap, competition over limited resources, misunderstanding among employees and employer and that certain types of conflicts, which may have negative effect on individual and group performance may have to be reduced. It also revealed that when conflict is properly managed, the positive effect can be used to encourage organizational innovativeness and build cooperation among the employees. It was recommended by the researchers among others that organizations or enterprises should adopt negotiation/dialogue as a major means of resolving conflicts because it involves both parties coming face to face with each other in order to find solution to confronting issues, management at all levels must ensure that they expand their human resource base in order to have proper control of the working environment that will lead to high productivity and workers' high level of human relations which will in turn reduce conflict and communication is key for the internal and overall functioning of any organization because it integrates the managerial functions.

Keywords: Organizational Conflict, Innovation, Strategy, Employee Performance.

Introduction

Conflict is inevitable in any business setting as it is the priority of top management of all profit making ventures and even public sector organizations to ensure that their organizations perform well in this competing business world. To achieve this, they must explore the pros and cons of all the factors that are directly or indirectly linked to the productivity of their employees in particular and their firms at large.

Conflict among workers in an organization is inevitable. If managed properly, conflict can augment and enhance employees' performance. Conversely, unmanaged conflict can be devastating if it stirs hostilities among individuals or groups. Evidence from related literature is mixed with regard to the effect of conflict on the performance of business enterprise. In the process of achieving organizational objectives, disappointments, disputes and conflict will surely arise. This strongly suggests that the occurrence of bickering, backbiting, blames shifting, gossiping and undermining of others can never be completely eradicated from any human society. Consequently, companies for some time now are faced with the problem of unionized and non-unionized agitations from employees of all levels.

Conflict in an organization arises in diverse forms and it has to be recognized and effectively dealt with. No organization or setting is conflict-free, and it is sometimes the workplace with the lowest levels of visible conflict that have very high levels of less visible or 'hidden' conflict. This means that every organization has an optimal level of conflict which may have positive or negative impact on the organization and the employee performance, conflict is very common in organization that its effect is too costly to be ignored. Conflict is often perceived as something bad and negative, scholars suggests that some conflict are good for an organization because it improves organizational effectiveness and can also lead to organizational learning and change (Jones, 2012). A negative work environment that does not promote conflict resolution can result in employee unethical behaviour and low productivity. Ariani (2015) observed that conflicts involve the total range of behaviours and attitudes that is in opposition between owners/managers on the one hand and working people on the other. It is a state of disagreement over issues of substance or emotional antagonism and may arise due to anger.

Conflict is based on the incompatibility of goals arising from opposing behaviour. It can be viewed at different levels such as the individual, group or organizational levels. Conflict may lead to confrontations and the outcomes are potentially destructive for at least one or both of the parties. Conflict is not necessarily good or bad, it is an inevitable characteristic of an organization's life and the result of its management can be seen in the organization's performance (Kreitner and Kinicky, 2003 as cited in Olakunle, 2008). Factors such as good pay, good working environment, cordial relationship among staff, due promotion etc. should be present to avoid organizational conflict.

Concept of Conflict

Conflict is considered as an unpleasant phenomenon in any organization or setting as long as people compete for jobs, resources, power, recognition and security. Organizational conflict can be regarded as a dispute that occurs when interests, goals or values of different individuals or groups are incompatible with other (Henry, 2009). Algert and Watson (2006) see conflict as a struggle or contest between people with opposing needs, ideas, values or goals. Conflict among groups

is inevitable; however, the results of conflict are not predetermined. They further explained that conflict might escalate and lead non-productive final products. Conflict as viewed in a metaphorical expression is seen as war, opportunity, and as a journey (Richard and Wade, 2009). However, anyone who views conflict from the perspective of war, will often try to win the situation at all cost, but by viewing conflict from the opportunistic perspective, and a journey, will tend to be more constructive, open minded and positive. No organizational setting is conflict free as every organization has an optimal level of conflict which may have positive or negative impact on the organization.

Organizational conflicts which have both negative and positive effects on employee performance, but when managed properly, the positive effects can be used to encourage organizational innovativeness and build cooperation among the employees. As with most organizational or management concepts, conflict has no universally accepted meaning as conflict may be referred to as a process that begins when one party perceives that another party has negatively affected, or is about to negatively affect something that the first party cares about. Henry (2010) opined that organizational conflict can be regarded as a dispute that occurs when interest, goals or values of different individuals or groups are incompatible with each other. Gbadamasi and Adebakin (2020) agreed that conflict is a perception and so it exists whenever someone believes or feels that another person or group might obstruct his efforts. It has also been observed that conflict is the result of interaction and contact among people. Conflict sets in as a result of differences of opinion regarding ideas, wishes or desires also (Stern, 2020). Conflict can arise between couples, work peers and political government, and understanding the basic types of conflicts that may occur in one's daily environment can help organizations avoid disagreement among employees or learn the best way to deal with conflict.

Conflict occurs when two or more people engage in a struggle over values and claims to status, power and resources in which the aim of the opponent is to neutralize, injure, or eliminate the rival (Ejere, 2016). Conflict emerges when one party perceives that one or more goals or purpose or means of achieving a goal or preference is being threatened or hindered by the activities of one or more parties/the parties may be seeking to expand into same field or physical sphere or, more abstractly, into the same field of influence or behavior. Conflict can thus be considered as a social and a normal functional and indeed inevitable aspect of the physical functioning of all societies.

Conflict is an angry disagreement between people or group. Organizational conflict results from disagreement between individuals, employees, work groups or departments (The McMillan English Dictionary, 2007). Managers engage in variety of exercises and discussions to learn who they are most likely to have conflict with and how they should try to resolve it. Conflict is therefore a product of incompatibility of goals and it arises from opposing behaviors. It can be viewed from individual groups or organizational levels. Agwu (2013) averred that conflict is a

necessary and useful part of organizational life. According to him, conflict is inevitable and an integral part of the process of change. Indeed, it is an aid to cooperation, not an obstacle. Although according to Jones (2012) conflict is often perceived as something negative, scholars suggests that some conflict are good for an organization because it improves organizational effectiveness and can also lead for organizational learning and change.

Organization may of course, experience too much conflict, which can result in paralysis of decision making, demotivation of members, lack of trust and communication, disrupted cultural commonality, conflict is not always or simply problematic.

Dimensions of Conflict

There have been different contending theoretical / dimensions / perspectives / approaches to organizational conflict to include: the traditional, human relations and interactions school of thought (Akowe 2002). The schools of thought have different dimensions, perceptions and views about organizational conflict which are:

Early Approach to Conflict: The early approach to conflict assumed that all conflict was bad. Conflict was viewed negatively and it was used synonymously with such terms as violence, destruction and irrationality to reinforce its negative connotation. The view that all conflict is bad certainly offers a simple approach to looking at the behavior of people who create conflict. Since conflict is and is to be avoided, attention is to be directed to the causes of conflict and efforts are made to correct the malfunctioning in order to improve group and organizational performance.

Traditional School of Thought: The traditional school of thought argues that conflict must be avoided because of all conflict are harmful and that it indicates malfunctioning within the group therefore it must be avoided. The traditional school of thought, viewed conflict negatively and it was used synonymously with such terms as violence, destruction, hostility and irregularity reinforce its negative connotation, meaning conflict by definition was harmful and was to be avoided (Oduma, 2004). The traditional view was consistent with the attributes that prevailed about group behavior in 1930's and 1940's. Conflict was seen as dysfunctional outcome resulting from poor communication, lack of openness and trust among people and the failure of managers to be responsive to the needs and aspiration of their employees.

Human Relation View: This view argues that conflict is &natural and inevitable outcome in any group in an organization and that needs not to be evil, but rather has the potential to be a positive force in determining group performance.

Interactionist Approach: It views conflicts on the grounds that harmonies, peaceful, tranquil and co-operative group is prone to becoming static, apathetic and

non-responsive to needs for change and innovation. The major contribution of this approach therefore is the encouragement of group leaders to maintain an ongoing minimum level of conflict enough to keep the group viable and creative. The interactionist view argues that conflict could be of utility to the organization as some level of conflict is necessary to effective performance. Furthermore, the advocates of this approach encourage management to maintain an ongoing minimum level of conflict necessary for keeping the group viable, self-critical and creative. However, the interactionist view does not propose that all conflicts are good as it recognizes that some conflicts prevent an organization from achieving its goals. These are dysfunctional conflicts that are destructive forms. On the other hand, functional conflicts that is of a constructive nature support the goals of the organization. This approach defines conflict management to include stimulations as well as resolution methods, and considers the management of conflict as a major responsibility of all managers. Adele (2022) posited that this model perceives organizational conflict as a continuum: at one extreme it may be too high thereby requiring resolution; and at the other extreme it is too low and need to be deliberately stimulated.

Types of Organisational Conflict

Organizational conflict has been categorized into two as follows; Functional Conflict and Dysfunctional Conflict (Agrawal, 2012).

Functional Conflict: This refers to confrontation between two, groups, goals and parties that improve employees and organizational performance. Lombardo (2014) maintained that functional conflict is healthy, constructive disagreement between groups and or individuals, and that the positive results of functional conflict are: awareness of both sides of issues, improvement of working conditions due to accomplishing solutions together, solving issues together to improve overall morale and making innovation and improvements within an organization.

Dysfunctional Conflict: It is an unhealthy disagreement and miss understanding that occurs between groups or individuals. It has the following negative results: individuals use threats, verbal abuse and deception, which destroy relationships, both parties can end up losing in this type of conflict and this type of conflict can lead to retaliation and further acts of negativity. Dysfunctional conflict can prevent the achievement of organizational objectives. However, conflict is an inherent part of organizational activity. And when it is not resolved effectively, negative consequences occur. There are numerable approaches to types of organizational conflicts. The following are types of dysfunctional conflict:

Vertical Conflict: Occurs because the line manager or team leader is always telling a member of staff what to do and tries to 'micro-manage'. While such employee should be left to do his/her job.

Horizontal Conflict: Occurs between members of staff within the same department,

and the same hierarchical level. This type of conflict can occur as a result of interest/ideas that has to do with distribution of organizational resources.

Line Staff Conflict: Occurs between support staff and line employees within various departments in an organization.

Role Conflict: This stems from an incomplete or otherwise fallacious understanding of the role or functions assigned to an employee. Conflict arising from role incomparability can as well interact with personal differences and the way individual seek power and influence, members may also perceive that their role are incompatible because they are operating from different bases of information.

Intrapersonal Conflict: This is an experience that takes place within an individual. These types of conflict are between an individual's values, goals and needs. It arises when the fulfillment of one value, goals or needs makes it impossible to fulfill some other value, goal or need. It might also occur in relation to temptation to stop dieting as well as in a major decision or getting into better physical shape to get a good evaluation report. An individual experiencing guilt as a result of inner conflicts often becomes depressed, irritable and restless. However, identifying the actual source of the conflict and distinguishing between what one wish to do and what should be done are two steps in managing inner conflict successfully. Wishing leads to day dreaming and continued conflict, while authentic wanting leads directly to a specific behavior. Thus, when there is a follow-through behavior, an individual feels stronger and more confident; he has risen to a personal through challenge and brought about positive personal change.

Interpersonal Conflict: This is a conflict between individuals in the same-organization. It exists whenever people interact in same way to produce results or achieve goals. According to them, because they differ, however, in many ways, attitude, personality, values, goals and background etc. the resultant conflict makes the attainment of the goals quite difficult. Therefore, learning to make the proper adjustments, is an important factor in managing interpersonal conflict. According Fadipe (2021) this type of conflict is likely in situation where individuals are competing for resources. It is also likely within group and that are heterogeneous not only in the sense of representing the diversity of the workforce but also when representing functions, as in the case of a cross functional team.

Inter Group Conflict: It occurs between groups in the same organization. It occurs whenever there is a contact or interaction between the groups. It occurs as a result of differences in the values of two or more groups. Workplace conflict just seems to be a fact of life. The fact that conflicts exist; among groups is not necessarily a bad

things as long as it is resolved effectively. It can lead to personal and professional growth. Conflict in work place is a painful reality and a key reasons for poor employee performance and frustration. Conflict does not automatically go away and only gets worse when ignored.

Causes of Organizational Conflict

Conflict can be caused and not limited to the following:

Scarcity of Resources: Scarcity of resources, such as promotion prospects, bonus payments and departmental budgets, creates competition, which often escalates into conflict.

Difference in Status: Difference In status, often created by legitimate or hierarchical power differential, create barriers to communications foster feelings of Inequality and causes consequence friction, which can lead to ambiguity and confusion over responsibilities.

Complex Organizational Structures: Complex organizational structures or configurations frequently make one group or individuals dependent on another: in this case conflict may occur between the parties, if only as a result of different priorities.

Quite Often the Objectives: Quite often the objectives, and tasks of individuals and groups can directly conflict with another in the same organization; a zero-sum game might apply where A's gain; is B's loss.

Cultural Differences: Conflict occurs between cultures or subcultures, within an organization which is often- referred to as - -tribalism.

Sources of Organizational Conflict

The main sources of conflict and their individual focus are personal differences (perception and expectations) information deficiency (misinformation and misinterpretation, role incompatibility goals and responsibilities, environmental stress, resource scarcity and uncertainly. Conflicts can also occur as a result of poor management errors and also misunderstanding among employees.

Various sources of organizational conflict have been well documented by a number of scholars.

Stages of Organizational Conflict

Conflict has the following major stages: latent, perceived, felt manifest and conflict aftermath. At the stage of latent conflict, the basic condition for potential conflict exist, but the persons or groups involved are yet to be fully aware of it. The second stage is perceived conflict. This is the stage that one or both participants involved recognize that conflict exists, although they cannot necessarily define it. The third stage is called felt conflict. This is the stage where tensions are beginning to build between participants, although no real struggle has yet begun. The fourth stage is known as manifest conflict. At this stage, the struggle is underway, and the

behavior of the participants makes the existence of the conflict apparent to others who are directly not involved in the conflict. The final stage is called conflict aftermath

Role of Organizational Conflict

Okojie (2018) views the following as positive and negative functions of organizational conflict:

Positive Functions of Organizational Conflict

Conflict is a means of bringing radical change. It is an effective device by which management drastically change the existing power structure, current interacting pattern, and entrenched attitudes.

Conflict facilitates group cohesiveness. Conflict increases hostility between groups, external threats that cause a group to pull together as a unit.

Conflict heightens group and organizational affection. Stimulation of conflict initiates the search for new means and goals and clear the ways of innovation.

The successful solution of a conflict leads to a greater attraction of members for each other and to deeper signalization of future conflicts.

Conflict brings about a slightly higher, more constructive level of tension. When the level of tension is very low, the parties are not sufficiently motivated to do something about a conflict.

Negative Functions of Organizational Conflict

The following are some itemized negative consequences of conflict: inefficiencies between work units, decrease in employee satisfaction, sabotage labor, grievances, strike and physical aggression, negative consequence of conflict can result to individuals or group becoming hostile and withhold or withdraw useful information or resources. This can cause committed and competent employees to leave the organization which can affect organizational performance. Conflict is a necessary and useful part of organizational, it is inevitable and an integral part of the process of change (Uchendu, Idem and Odigwe, 2013).

Strategies for Managing Organizational Conflict

Managing and coping with conflict effectively demand different professional abilities and acumen. To resolve and manage conflict, the organization must understand the causes, theories, approaches and strategies of conflict management. It has been widely established that the conflict management strategies of the executives has a definite impact on the work performance of the individuals. The following according to Henry (2009) are conflict-handling strategies:

Clarity and Openness: It is based on the notion that conflict can arise where there is a lack of clarity about the intentions of management or other people. A commitment to ensure a clarity and open-ness within the organization can go some considerable

way to provide climate of trust which in turn minimizes the possibility for misunderstanding conflict in an organization.

Communication and Consultation Procedures: This can arise though a lack of knowledge or the misunderstanding of the actions and intentions of others. Communication and consultation between the various groups that exist within an organization should facilitate an improved level of understanding and knowledge which in turn should reduce conflict.

Negotiation: This provides a process by which individuals and groups can directly resolve their differences. It is a process of reaching an accommodation that is acceptable to all parties to the process. However, it assumes that all parties are prepared to negotiate and reach a compromise which although less than all parties are prepared to negotiate and reach a compromise which although less than ideal would be acceptable.

Discipline and Grievance Procedure: One best way to redress conflict within an organization is through the application of the disciplinary procedure by management; equally, if an employee feels that they are being discriminated against by a manager (perhaps not being given an opportunity for promotion to a more senior position). They have the grievance procedure through which to *seek* redress for this conflict.

Avoidance: It reflects a minimalist approach to the situation. It constitutes desire to ignore the problems and hope that it will go away. Common responses include ignoring the problem, evading specific attempt to deal with it and elongating any procedural devices invoked to deal with it. This is the active avoidance of any open confrontation or hostility.

Increase Resources: An obvious way to reduce conflict due to resource scarcity is to increase the amount of resources available (Okoje, 2000). Corporate decision makers might quickly dismiss the resolution because of the cost involved. However, they need to carefully compare those costs with the cost of dysfunctional conflict arising out of resource scarcity.

Conflict Resolution Models/Styles

Conflicts are resolved in variety of ways and models have been developed along this line (Gbadamosi and Adebakin, 2020). The following five strategies will help managers in resolving organizational conflict:

Accommodating: It is the situation where one has high concern for others and low concern for self. This conflict style user attempts to resolve conflict by giving in to the other party. This means the Individual is less assertive but more co-operative. This means reflects an element of sacrifice and may be a reflection of low-self esteem. Furthermore, when you are in conflict, you have five conflicts resolution styles to choose from. The five styles are based on two dimensions of concern: concern for others needs and concern for your own needs. These concerns result in three types of behavior. A low concern for your own needs and a high concern for

others need result in passive behavior. A high concern for your own needs and a low concern for others' need results in aggressive behavior.

Collaborating Conflict Resolution Style: Here, the collaborating conflict style user assertively attempts to jointly resolve the conflict with the best solution agreeable to all parties. It is also called problem-solving style. When organizations use the collaborating approach, they are being assertive and cooperative. Although avoiders and accommodates are concerned about others needs, and forcers are concerned about their own needs, the collaborator is concerned about finding the best solution to the problem that is satisfactory to all parties.

Forcing Conflict Resolution Style: It attempts to resolve the conflict by using aggressive behavior to get their own way. When an individual use the forcing style, *you* are uncooperative and aggressive, doing whatever, it takes to satisfy your own needs at the expense of others. Forcers use authority, threaten intimidate and call for majority rule when they know they will win. Forcers commonly enjoy dealing with avoiders and accommodators. The users of this style try to get others to change without being willing *la* change themselves, regardless of the means. The forcing conflict resolution style is of advantage to the organization in terms of making a better decision when the forcer is correct.

Confrontation: Here, parties may choose to fight it out with one another, this may involve the use of violent attack and sometimes the two parties may lose or in the same situation, the stronger party wins all.

Problem Solving: This is an approach whereby the parties listen, discuss the issue together, understand the conflict and attack the issue. The parties normally show respect! for differences and are not concern about who is right or who is wrong. The approach leads to a win-win situation and both parties are usually satisfied with the outcome of the resolution and relationships are often resorted.

Effect of Conflict on Employees' Performance

Conflict has different effects or implications on the performance of an employee. Hence, people automatically assume that conflict is related to lower group and organizational effectiveness. The levels of conflict in organization can be either too high or too low. Either extreme hinders performance. An optimal level is one at which there is enough conflict to prevent stagnation, stimulate creativity, allow tensions to be released and initiate the seeds for change, yet not so much as to be disruptive or to deter coordination of activities. Inadequate or excessive levels of conflict can hinder the effectiveness of a group or an organization, resulting in reduced satisfaction of group members, increased absence and turnover rates and, eventually lower productivity. On the other hand, when conflict is at an optimal level, complacency and apathy should be minimized, motivation should be enhanced through the creation of a challenging and questioning environment with a vitality that makes work interesting, and there should be the amount of turnover needed to free the organization of misfits and poor performance.

Volonio and Turban (2020) stated that organization have missions and goals that they attempt to achieve, if conflicts are not resolved properly it might affect the organization adversely in terms of poor performance, lack of cooperation, wasting of resources and productivity. In addition, conflict has positive effect to the organization especially in building cooperation among the employees, encourages organizational innovativeness and improves quality decisions in resolving conflict. Therefore it is (he duty of the management and the employees to develop ways on how to promote cohesiveness in organizations and if possible, conflicts should be resolved at their stage to enhance organizational performance.

Conclusion

The study examined organizational conflict as a strategy for employee performance. Organizational conflict has both negative and positive effects on employee performance, however, when properly managed, the positive effects can be used to encourage organizational innovation and build cooperation among employees and management. In as much as conflict does not necessarily pass through all of the earlier mentioned stages and each participant in a conflict may not be at the same stage. All work environments are prone to conflict, as such every organization has an optimal level of conflict which may have positive or negative impact on the organization. In as much as conflict is an inevitable part of organizational life, conflict cannot always be avoided especially when fundamental differences, as opposed to perceived differences, are involved. It is therefore, key to state that not all conflicts have negative effects on individuals or groups as the ability to manage such conflicts makes one a better manager and solution provider. In doing so, one has to keep wasteful and damaging conflicts to a minimum and when conflict does occur, relevant techniques should be used in addressing such a conflict.

Suggestions

The researchers made the following suggestions in line with the topic:

1. Organizations or enterprises should adopt negotiation/dialogue as a major means for resolving conflicts because it involves both parties coming face to face with each other in order to find solution to confronting issues.
2. Management at all levels must ensure that they expand their human resource base in order to have proper control of the working environment that will lead to high productivity and workers' high level of human relations which will in turn reduce conflict.
3. Communication is key for the internal and overall functioning of any organization because it integrates the managerial functions. To achieve these goals, the management should ensure effective communication. It is the means by which organized activity is unified, behaviors is modified, change is affected, information is made and employees' performance enhanced.
4. Decisions should be properly communicated to subordinates or rather

subordinates should be involved in the decision making process of the organization.

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