MITIGATING ORGANISATIONAL CONFLICT THROUGH EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION MANAGEMENT

[1]NGIGE, Chukwudum V. [2]BADEKALE, A. Foluso & [3]HAMMANJODA, I .

[1,2&3]Centre for Peace and Security Studies, Modibbo Adama University of Technology, Yola, Adamawa State, Nigeria, P.M.B. 2076, Yola, Adamawa State, Nigeria.

Corresponding author**:** ngigecompact@hotmail.com; ngigeresources@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Communication is essential to any kind of organisation and information plays a crucial role in effective communication. An effective communication management is considered to be a lifeline for many projects that an organisation undertakes as well as any department of the organisation. The organisational life is one that is based on collaborative relationships with both colleagues and those outside the organisation. It requires individuals to work closely with others with varying backgrounds or cultures. Individuals can hold diverse values, potentially affecting these relationships, which may result in conflict. Good communication or conflict resolution skills can decrease the risk of conflict. Dealing with conflict properly requires the individual to develop conflict resolution skills. This is done through conscious effort to control the individuals' behavior of poor communication. The study therefore focused on mitigating organisational conflict through effective communication management. The study identifies two sources of conflict in organisation and they include: Internal Sources: this is so called because they refer to factors which are inherent within the framework of an organisation. The External Sources: these are so called because they are outside the four walls of an organisation. The study observed that poor communication always results in misunderstandings and eventually conflicts in organisation. Thus, the study recommended that an integrative and strategic communication is essential in managing organisations successfully.

Key Words: *Effective Communication, Communication Management, Organisation, Conflict.*

INTRODUCTION

In every organisation, there are different individuals and groups, and every individual has a different personality, they may also have different opinions, views, values and perceptions on certain things. Moemeka (2013) observed that organisation members must interact and organisations need such interaction to be productive. As people with diverse background come together in a working environment, differences in opinion, attitudes and beliefs are bound to occur as they interact. How such differences are managed determines the impact they can have on productivity and therefore organisational goals. Recognizing and addressing the factors that give rise to potential conflicts can have a positive impact on the workplace and productivity (Dramani and Marfo, 2010).

Conflict is inevitable and even desirable, to work in an organisation is to be in conflict. To take advantage of joint work requires conflict management. According to Spaho (2013), it is not possible to imagine organisational without conflicts. Conflicts are normal in any organisation, because people have different opinions, while some individuals cannot accept other people's different opinions, though Spaho (2013) still opined that it is dangerous for an organisation to have too many conflicts, as well as not to have any conflicts

at all. For Dramani and Marfo (2010), whether a conflict will be a blessing or a curse to any individual, group or organisation depends on how the problem is seen and managed. They argued that it is important to note that while unresolved or poorly resolved conflict can have devastating consequences on productivity, a well-managed organisational conflict can promote team work, efficiency and therefore increased productivity towards the realization of organisational goals. Supporting the view above, Nwagbara and Brown (2014) also opined that conflicts are unavoidable in organisations because there are different interests, which shape organisational wellbeing and conflict and organisational existence are indissoluble. Also, conflicts exist because they are means by which organisations make adjustments, compromises and learn to adapt to changes. Since conflict, organisational success and sustainability are inextricably related, it is better to rethink how to manage conflict, rather than avoid it. Robbins (2005) says that, although there is no classification of the sources of conflict according to their importance, it is considered that most of the conflicts are due to communication problems. Although conflicts are inevitable in organisation, how to manage them via communication for sustainability is essential given the communications challenge that organisations face.

Thus, integrative and strategic communication is essential in managing organisations successfully. So, integrative or shared communication is central to managing conflict for sustainability as it tends to remove doubts in the minds of stakeholders. Therefore, communication is necessary for conducting business in an efficient manner. It is the process by which individuals stimulate meaning in the minds of other individuals by means of verbal or nonverbal messages. One of the challenges in the organisation/workplace is learning the specific communication styles of others and how and when to share your ideas or concerns. Effective communication skills serve a key role in successfully resolving conflict, both in the home and in the organisations. In that regard, Switzer (2014) says communication has a big role to play in conflict management. It has been observed that poor communication always results in misunderstandings and eventually conflicts. Switzer (2014) asserted that an effective communication skill for successfully resolving conflicts is to address only one issue at a time and avoid introducing other topics, even if they are related. Also, Conerly (2004) states that effective communication helps individuals learn how to respond to conflict, making it an unconscious process. Dealing with conflict properly requires the individual to develop conflict resolution skills. This is a conscious effort to control the individuals' behavior of poor communication.

The foregoing demonstrates that communication is complex and requires a good measure of relationship building and participation to build trust. In contemporary organisational studies and management, representation of stakeholder interests in corporate communication has been lauded as providing a platform for engagement, mutuality and profitability as it serves as a springboard for dousing potential conflict as different individuals and interests are appreciably represented. Based on this therefore, the study examines effective communication management and organisational conflict management.

ORGANISATIONAL CONFLICT

Organisational conflict as it stands now is considered legitimate and inevitable and a positive indicator of effective organisational management. It is now recognized that conflict within certain limits is essential to productivity. Conflict can be functional to the extent to which it results in the creative solution to problems or the effective attainment of subsystem or organisational objectives that otherwise would not have been possible. Little or no conflict in organisations may lead to stagnation, poor decisions, and ineffectiveness (Rahim, 2001).

Whetten and Cameron (2007) asserted that workplace conflict is a state of discord caused by the actual or perceived opposition of needs, values and interests between people working together. With reference to organisations, conflict is the disagreement between employees, departments, managers or groups of people within the business entity. Disagreements may arise due to differences in points of view, ideology or

unhealthy competition that may yield either positive or negative consequences. Regardless of the type or level of conflict, a number of major functional and dysfunctional consequences can arise from conflict.

Therefore, organisational conflict arises in groups because of the scarcity of freedom, position, and resources. People who value independence tend to resist the need for interdependence and, to some extent, conformity within a group. People who seek power therefore struggle with others for position or status within the group. Rewards and recognition are often perceived as insufficient and improperly distributed, and members are inclined to compete with each other for these prizes (Daphne, 2003). Disagreement which occurs when goals, interests or values of various individuals or groups are incompatible, and those people block each other's efforts for accomplishing goals is called organisational conflict. Reduction of work performance efficiency, reduced communication among employees, motivation fall and ultimate employees' dissatisfaction are only some of the numerous negative consequences of conflict. But the conflict itself does not have to be negative; the majority of conflicts can in fact be an excellent ground for accomplishment of better business results, and an impulse for changes and growth of the organisation itself.

Administrators must accept the need to influence the developmental dynamics of a conflict, so that the parties' attitudes and actions will lead to better coordination and a more appropriate interdependence. They must not seek to stifle or eliminate organisational conflict for that is hardly a realistic goal. An organisation devoid of conflict may indicate autocracy, uniformity, stagnation and mental fixity. It would also be protecting only the vested interests of the status quo. Administrators must accept and indeed occasionally encourage conflict, because change and other desirable consequences are products of conflict. The challenge that administrators face is to utilize such conflict management techniques that would ensure that as a conflict passes from a latent to a manifest phase, it proceeds towards its potential and realizes its constructive values.

EFFECTS OF ORGANISATIONAL CONFLICT

Duly recognition and adequate conflict management can lead to series of positive effects like stimulation of creativity and innovation within the company, stimulation of changes towards work quality improvement, reduction of incurred tensions etc. Moreover, in case conflicts lead to constructive changes they should be encouraged in order to make a good relation among employees based on mutual respect (Whetten and Cameron, 2007). Sometimes conflicts should be regarded as a resource which enables us constant new learning, new knowledge and a potential growth and development of organisation. Other positive effects according to Whetten and Cameron (2007) include:

i. Inspire creativity: - fortunately, some organisations view conflict as an opportunity for finding creative solutions to problems. Conflict can inspire members to brainstorm, while examining problems from various perspectives.

ii. Share and Respect Opinions:- As organisation members work together to solve conflict, they are more willing to share their opinions with other members of the group. Conflict can also cause members to actively listen to each other as they work to accomplish the organisational goals.

iii. Improve future communication:- conflict can bring group members together and help them learn more about each other. From learning each other's opinion on topics relevant to the organisation's growth to understanding each member's preferred communication styles, conflict within an organisation can give members the tools necessary to easily solve conflicts in the future. Conflict may stimulate innovation, creativity, and growth.

Furthermore, organisational decision making may be improved, alternative solutions to a problem may be found, conflict may lead to synergistic solutions to common problems, Individual and group performance

may be enhanced. Individuals and groups may be forced to search for new approaches, individuals and groups may be required to articulate and clarify their positions.

The dysfunctional effects according to Oladosu and Ashimi (2014) are: conflicts affect individual and organisational performance. Resolving conflicts takes a toll on managerial time and energy which could be more productively spent. In a conflict situation, people may promote their self-interests or personal gains at the cost of others or the organisation. Intense conflicts over a prolonged period affect individuals emotionally and physically and give rise to psychosomatic disorders. Time spent on conflicts, if costed, could have been spent doing more productive things. Conflict may lead to work sabotage, employee morale problems, decline in the market share of product/service and consequent loss of productivity. Conflict may cause job stress, burnout, and dissatisfaction. Communication between individuals and groups may be reduced. A climate of distrust and suspicion can be developed. Relationships may be damaged. Job performance may be reduced. Resistance to change can increase. Organisational commitment and loyalty may be affected.

COMMUNICATION AND COMMUNICATION MANAGEMENT IN ORGANISATION

Communication is one of the central components of every organisation; therefore, it is clear why is the better understanding of communication efficacy the key to the overall organisational success. Communication, in general, may be defined as the process by which information is exchanged between individuals using written messages, spoken words, or gestures. It is a dynamic, interpersonal process in which an individual modifies his response on the basis of the behavior of the recipient of the message (McCroskey and Richmond, 1996). Managers need timely and appropriate information to make sound decisions. Therefore, communication is essential for the effective functioning of organisations. Communication need not always involve the exchange of words. Nonverbal communication refers to the use of nonword human responses like facial expressions and gestures and the perceived characteristics of the environment through which the human verbal and nonverbal messages are transmitted. Effective Communication is significant for managers in the organisations so as to perform the basic functions of management, i.e., Planning, Organizing, Leading and Controlling.

Communication helps managers in organisations to perform their jobs and responsibilities. Communication serves as a foundation for planning. Mcshane and Glinow (2008) posited that all the essential information must be communicated to the managers who in-turn must communicate the plans so as to implement them. Organizing also requires effective communication with others about their job task. Similarly leaders as managers must communicate effectively with their subordinates so as to achieve the team goals. Controlling is not possible without written and oral communication. Kinicki and Kreithner (2008) believed that communication promotes motivation by informing and clarifying the employees about the task to be done, the manner they are performing the task, and how to improve their performance if it is not up to the mark. For Walby (2007), communication is a source of information to the organisational members for decision-making process as it helps identifying and assessing alternative course of actions. Communication also plays a crucial role in altering individual's attitudes, i.e., a well informed individual will have better attitude than a less-informed individual. Organisational magazines, journals, meetings and various other forms of oral and written communication help in moulding employee's attitudes. Communication also helps in socializing. In today's life the only presence of another individual fosters communication. It is also said that one cannot survive without communication.

Hence, the importance of communication in the organisation is important because of: the company's goal setting and their carrying out, the development of plans towards their realisation, human and other resources management in the most successful and appropriate way, the choice, the progress and the performance evaluation of the organisation members, the management, guiding, motivating and creating a climate in which people want to contribute, the control over realisation. Communication in the organisation represents a

complex system of the flow of information, orders, wishes and references made out of two partially complementary systems: formal communication network and informal communication network (McPhee and Zaug, 2000).

From the above discussions, communication assists in controlling process. It helps controlling organisational member's behaviour in various ways. There are various levels of hierarchy and certain principles and guidelines that employees must follow in an organisation. They must comply with organisational policies, perform their job role efficiently and communicate any work problem and grievance to their superiors. Thus, communication helps in controlling function of management. An effective and efficient communication system requires managerial proficiency in delivering and receiving messages. A manager must discover various barriers to communication, analyze the reasons for their occurrence and take preventive steps to avoid those barriers. Thus, the primary responsibility of a manager is to develop and maintain an effective communication system in the organisation.

In other hand, communications management is the systematic planning, implementing, monitoring, and revision of all the channels of communication within an organisation, and between organisations; it also includes the organisation and dissemination of new communication directives connected with an organisation, network, or communications technology (Borisoff and David, 1989). Aspects of communications management include developing corporate communication strategies, designing internal and external communications directives, and managing the flow of information, including online communication. Communication management refers to a systematic plan, which implements and monitors the channels and content of communication. Communication management is essential to any kind of organisation and information plays a crucial role in effective communication. Theory on organisational communication has evolved from the concept as a tool of management designed to facilitate task completion and as such was to operate as one of many organisational variables (Shockley-Zalabak, 2006). Eunju (2009) posited that as an organizing process, communication management is not just a tool of management but a critical element to affect management. Therefore, an effective communication management is considered to be a lifeline for many projects that an organisation undertakes as well as any department of the organisation. Communication management is vital for any organisation irrespective of its size. It contributes to achieving the company's overall objectives as well as creates a positive and friendly environment. An effective communication process within the organisation will lead to an increase in profits, high employee satisfaction and brand recognition.

MITIGATING ORGANISATIONAL CONFLICT THROUGH COMMUNICATION MANAGEMENT

Organisational conflict occurs, as actors engage in activities that are incompatible with those of colleagues within their network, members of other organisations, or unaffiliated individuals who utilize the services or products of the organisation (Rahim, 2002). Fajana (2000) cited in Ashimi and Omisore (2014) identifies two sources of conflict in organisation and they include: (i) Internal Sources: This is so called because they refer to factors which are inherent within the framework of an organisation. Fajana (2000) states that the major prime factor of internal sources of conflict is the opposing interests of industrial actors. Apart from the above, it is another statement of fact that there is usually power relationship between the two actors in an industry which no doubt produce conflict and make such inevitable. (ii) The External Sources: These are so called because they are outside the four walls of an organisation. It may occur when the third party intervention to industrial dispute becomes one sided or biased. A good example is where government as the third and regulatory party tries to formulate policy or enact laws that favour one party at the detriment of the other. Such may generate conflict. Organisational conflict management suggests solving conflicts, instead of reducing, eliminating or limiting their duration. This means that each organisation should have a macro strategy, reducing the negative consequences of conflicts (Spaho, 2013). In modern business, conflict management needs some changes in its approach. Modern organisation needs a macro organisation strategy

that completely reduces negative effects of conflicts, makes use of their constructive dimension and contributes to organisational learning and success.

According to Ashimi and Omisore (2014), during conflict, strong emotions appear which can hurt feelings. When conflict is handled in an unhealthy way, it can be the cause of irreparable rifts, resentments, and break-ups. When an organisation deals with a conflict in a healthy way, it increases the understanding among people, builds trust and strengthens relationships. It is believed that the ability to resolve conflicts successfully depends on the ability to: manage stress quickly by staying calm. In this way a person can properly read and interpret verbal and non-verbal communication; control emotions and behaviour. When a person can control his emotions it is simpler to communicate the needs without threatening, fighting or punishing others; pay attention to the feelings and works of other people; and be aware of and respectful of differences by avoiding disrespectful words. In this way problems can be resolved faster (Ashimi and Omisore, 2014).

From the forgoing, disparity in technical knowledge could lead to miscommunications and may escalate to conflicts that could be detrimental to organisation. Communication management therefore is seen as vital to building trust within an organisation resulting in reduced conflicts and increased positive. Communication management behaviors such as empathy can create a cycle of supportiveness amongst the staff in the organisation. Neutrality on the other hand indicates indifferent to others' feelings. Communicative management behaviors displaying mutual trust and openness in accepting others' views could enhance supportive communication climate in an organisation. Communication management is another supportive behavior that demonstrates open-mindedness and willingness to accept others' ideas. Ashimi and Omisore (2014) noted that the combination of communicating provisionally, describing concerns, using a problem orientation in decision-making, spontaneity in problem-solving with genuine motives, expressing empathy, and emphasizing equality creates a supportive communication climate in the organisation.

Efficient communication management encourages worker participation, free and open exchange of information, and constructive conflict resolution. In organisations with defensive climates, employees keep their views to themselves, make only guarded statements and suffer from reduced morale (Miller, 2006). Thus effective communication is important for the establishment of a collaborative communication climate. However, management of controversy and divergent thoughts as part of the communication climate forms a crucial task to be achieved in an organisation.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conflict management has developed into an important sub-field of organisational behavior within a short time period. There are many types and forms of communication within organisations. Two of the most important ones are formal and informal communication. It is considered that most of the conflicts are due to communication problems. Communications is important in solving conflicts because it can increase understanding and reduce the risk of jumping to conclusions or making generalizations. It is important to understand first the sources of most conflict situations. There are several situations that can be considered failed communication: when communication includes only a part of the necessary information, when it incorporates ambiguous or threatening information or when it offers too much information (either in terms of quantity or too highly coded for the recipient) (Hener, 2010).

Errors in communication are one of the major sources of conflict in organisation. These errors come from people's inability to listen to each other. In addition, errors come from information lost in upward and downward communication, due to inadequate understanding, or from one's emotional status in the moment of communication. For solving conflicts communication uses three functions. The first is referring to the understanding and knowing of ourselves and of the others we interact with, so we can know what to expect from them and how we can influence them and, on the other hand, to make our own position known so they

can react to it. The second function of communication is about developing a consistent relationship with the others, so that we could give significance to our reality the individual socializing function. The third function refers to the dimension of communication influence and persuasion, developing further the idea of common effort and collaboration. Communication and conflict are in an interdependent relationship; communication can engender conflicts, can escalate conflicts and it also can prevent conflicts, help in conflict management and resolution activities. The study thereby concludes that it is impossible to eliminate conflict totally. Mangers who try to eliminate conflict will not last long, while those who manage it well will typically experience both institutional benefits and personal satisfaction.

In order to reduce conflicts in an organisation in the long run, it is necessary to define all previous communication related conflicts, their causes and the way they were solved. Therefore, to avoid rumour mongering organisations should evolve a proper system of information dissemination to all and sundry; Training workshops should be organized for staff of organisations on conflict resolution procedure. Managers should be sensitive to when banter becomes bickering or when teasing starts to have a hurtful edge. They should be prepared to step in and have a quiet word with the team members involved. The manager should inform those involved that while lively interaction is encouraged, it's important that there is mutual respect and that certain standards of behaviour are expected at work. The manager should have noted examples of the types of behaviour or language that have been used that are inappropriate at work so that those involved will understand what is unacceptable. In many cases conflicts can be defused by effective early intervention by the manager. However, there will be some situations that will blow up with very little warning, either because of the personalities of those involved or because of something happening in someone's domestic life that is putting them under pressure that they're having problems dealing with. However, regardless of the reason, where an individual's behaviour leads to serious misconduct, the formal disciplinary or grievance procedure must be used so that the matter is investigated fairly and decisions are not made in the heat of the moment.

Finally, greater attention should be paid to the communication as the element of organisational behaviour because of the growing changes within organisations which face the leadership with new challenges and opportunities for testing the different organisational behaviour concept modes. By identifying the level of communication satisfaction within the organisation we get an insight into organisational forces, but simultaneously also get an insight into weak points in the area of communication within the organisation. We can also use them as the basis for making important business decisions within the organisation.

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