

INDUSTRIAL CONFLICT AND ITS EFFECTS ON WORKPLACE EFFICIENCY

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Abstract

Behavioural and social scientists generally are unanimous on the fact that conflict is inevitable wherever there is some opportunity for choice-making in settings that bring people together to achieve certain goals or objectives. Whether at inter-personal, group, workplace or at larger society levels, conflict should normally be expected, because certain disagreements must necessarily occur, as humans, by nature are bound to reason and act differently. This article therefore, examined industrial conflict and its effects on workplace efficiency, with a view to fashioning ways and means of its effective management. This is considered from the following three points' objectives, namely: an assessment of the concept of conflict; evaluation of the effects of conflict in an industrial setting; measurement of industrial conflict solution, and suggestions on the management of industrial conflict. The paper made use of primary and secondary sources of data collection, and was analysed with descriptive and content analyses. The study findings revealed that, the flow of work in organisations may be affected adversely by protracted conflicts at workplace, especially on the level of performance, and attendant multiplier effects on level of production, sales volume and rate of turnover per time. The paper concluded that, though industrial conflicts are said to be inevitable, efforts and strategies can however be put in place by top management of organisations to mitigate and checkmate their occurrences.

Keywords: Conflict, Industrial conflict, Conflict Solution Measurement, Conflict Management

1. Introduction

Conflict refers to more than just overt behaviour. Concentrating only upon its behavioural manifestation is an extremely limiting exercise. The three-dimensional conceptions of conflict emphasises the need to consider the situation in which parties (individuals, groups or organisations) come to possess incompatible goals, their structure of interaction and the nature of their goals. Emotional (e.g. distrust) and cognitive (e.g. stereotyping) orientations that accompany a conflict situation as well as the range of actions undertaken by any party in a situation of conflict should be considered.

Conflict generally can be viewed as the result of disagreement in behaviour among people having identical goals, stemming mainly from variations in levels of reasoning, thinking, perceptions and an innate desire to advance interests that are directly of benefit to an individual. It is the result of refusal or failure on the part of individuals to see things

with the same lenses with another or others. Conflict sets in whenever there are variations or deviations in the mindsets of those who, ordinarily, should align towards the achievement of set goals. Whether intra-personal, inter-personal, intra-departmental or inter-departmental, humans are at the background of every conflict situation. In other words, human make ups, behaviours, actions and in-actions are what give rise to conflicts which accentuates to an industrial or organisational dimension.

Organisations are living systems consisting of interacting units performing a task in a mutually dependent manner within a structure of scarce resources. It seems commonplace to suggest that conflicts would be present in such a setting. The parties in an organisation may have a conflict about the distribution of resources, or have a more fundamental conflict about the very structure of their organisation and the basic nature of their interactions. Once the parties are in a situation of goal incompatibility, their conflict develops in a dynamic fashion, initiating valuable and much-needed constructive changes or leading to escalating strategies and destructive consequences. As there is nothing pre-determined about its course or development, it seems erroneous to view conflict from a negative perspective only, as destructive or dysfunctional. It is true that conflict may be uncomfortable, it may even be a source of problems, but it is absolutely necessary if change is to occur, or organisations are to survive and adapt. Organisational change and innovation do not just happen, it requires a stimulant. That stimulant is conflict.

Managers must accept the need to influence the developmental dynamics of a conflict, so that the parties' attitudes and actions will lead to better co-ordination and a more appropriate inter-dependence. They must not seek to stifle or eliminate organisational conflict, for that is hardly a realistic goal. As *Rico* (1964) has noted, 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. Managers must accept and indeed occasionally encourage conflict, because change and other desirable consequences are products of conflict. The challenge which managers face is to utilise 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 realises its constructive values.

Behavioural and social scientists alike are of the opinion that, conflict is rampant in all social lives. They see it as an inevitable part of living because it is related to situations of scarce resources, division of functions, power relations and role-differentiation. They argue that, due to its pervasive nature, the concept had acquired a multitude of meanings and connotations presenting us with nothing short of a semantic jungle. Like other terms, conflict generates considerable contradiction and leaves many scholars and Managers quite uncertain about its meaning and relevance as well as how best to cope with it.

If conflicts are not effectively managed or controlled, they result in crisis or outright violence. Hence, this article particularly emphasised the negative effects of conflict in an organisation, and underscored efforts towards resolution and averting

recurrences both to strengthen workers' confidence in the organisation and for the goal of the organisation to be met.

2. Literature Review

Research into Organisational Behaviour can be divided into two categories, namely: *normative* and *descriptive*. Normative research is concerned with how things should be, whereas descriptive research addresses itself to what is – rather than what could or should be. This dual perspective is most apparent in approaches to the issues of conflict and its measurement and management in organisations. Normative approaches reflect attitudes and beliefs which identify all conflicts as destructive and promotes conflict-elimination as the formula for organisational success. Descriptive approaches on the other hand accept conflict as inevitable and considers its proper management as the primary responsibility of all Managers. This paper aligns itself with the descriptive mode of inquiry in presenting a framework for the study of conflict in organisations. But it goes beyond this domain in suggesting that Managers must take the offensive and seek to manage conflict, and also in advocating a paradigm shift from the traditional methods of dealing with conflict to a new and more sophisticated approach.

2.1. Definition of Conflict

The normative conception of conflict, strongly influenced by a pre-occupation with stability and equilibrium in organisational design, links conflict to violence, destruction, inefficiency and irrationality. This form of intellectual short-sightedness was especially unpleasant in suggesting that Managers have the responsibility of avoiding, controlling or eliminating conflict. Descriptive approaches challenge the whole basis and rationale of these assumptions. They permit us to depart from an outmoded paradigm by suggesting that any social interaction in which the parties (however they may be structured or defined) compete for scarce resources or values has the potential for conflict. Using the term in a broad sense, it can be suggested that conflict refers to all kinds of antagonistic interactions. More specifically, it can be defined as a situation in which two or more parties have incompatible objectives and in which their perceptions and behaviour are commensurate with that incompatibility. This definition is purposely broad. It suggests that conflict is a social phenomenon that is found in personal, group or organisational interactions. As such, it comprises several dimensions.

In measuring solution in organisational conflict, *Fink (1968)* distinguishes between antagonistic-psychological relations and antagonistic behaviour, whereas *Pondy (1967)* observes that conflict is made up of antecedent, affective, cognitive and behavioural conditions respectively. We advance a conception of conflict which emphasises its three, inter-related dimensions, namely: *conflict situation* (the basic incompatibility), *conflict attitudes* (range of psychological factors) and *conflict behaviour* (set of related behaviours).

2.2. Conceptual Clarifications

The paper herewith attempts a clarification of concepts that are rather prominent and/or germane to the study as follows:

2.2.1 Analysing Industrial Conflict

From a Behavioural Science argument perspective, three distinct criteria define the role of a manager in an organisation, namely: planning, resource allocation and conflict management. There is no doubt that managing conflict permeates every aspect of the administrative or managerial roles. Awareness of the various forms of conflict management that can be employed at different stages of the development of a conflict is vital, if managers are to organise efforts towards influencing the conflict situation, the parties' attitudes or their behaviours. Furthermore, effective conflict management requires a recognition of the sources that generate a conflict. What, then, are the sources or bases of organisational conflicts?

2.2.2 Sources of Conflict

Organisational conflict appears in a variety of forms and has varying causes. These can generally be separated into several categories. Katz (1964) identifies three sources of conflict. These, according to him are: *structural conflict* (conflict arising out of the need to manage the inter-dependence among different organisational sub-units), *role conflict* (conflict arising from sets of prescribed behaviour) and *resources conflict* (conflict stemming from interest groups competing for organisational resources). Robbins (1974) on his part, also identifies three other sources of organisational conflict and indicates that an understanding of the source of a conflict improves the probability of effective conflict management. According to him, the main factors which serve as sources of conflict are: *communicational* (conflicts arising from mis-understandings etc.), *structural* (conflicts related to organisational roles), and *personal* (conflicts stemming from individual differences). It is however important to state that, methods of conflict management which are appropriate in one case may not necessarily be appropriate when applied to a conflict generated from another source. Here, a different perspective which traces the source of organisational conflict to the unit of analysis involved may be suggested.

Units of Analysis are the parties to a conflict. They perceive, initiate and sustain a conflict. Their characteristics specify the conditions which affect the course of a conflict and determine the mode of its management. Thus, there are conflicts that originate in the individual person (*intra-personal*), conflicts that have their basis in the relationship between individuals (*inter-personal*), and conflicts that occur as a result of interactions between groups within an industrial setting (*group or inter-departmental*) conflicts respectively. Each of these categories raises different questions about the three inter-related components of conflict and emphasises different aspects of conflict management.

2.2.3 Intra-personal Conflict

Intra-personal conflict is internal to the individual, yet its effects can profoundly influence organisational functioning, and perhaps the most difficult form of conflict to measure and manage. Intra-personal conflict is basically a conflict between two incompatible tendencies. It arises when a stimulus evokes two different and incompatible tendencies and the individual is required to discriminate between these tendencies. In such a situation it is common for individuals to experience frustrations and to allow their conflict situation to be expressed in a range of behavioural strategies ranging from apathy and boredom to absenteeism, excessive drinking or destructive behaviours. If such behavioural consequences are to be avoided, then it is essential to diagnose individual perception and utilise some techniques that would reduce anxiety-eliciting stimuli and increase consonance between individual behaviour and organisational requirements.

2.2.4 Inter-personal Conflict

Inter-personal conflict emphasises the interaction of human factors in an organisation. Here we are concerned with these factors as they appear in a dyadic relationship. Two classes of factors can broadly be suggested here as conflict sources. These are: Firstly,

Personal. Individuals are not identical, constant or consistent. When two individuals are brought together and kept together, each with his own qualities, needs and skills, a conflict may ensue if their attributes are not meshed together in a co-ordinate way. Interaction between individuals with different attitudes, values and needs can produce conflict behaviours and affect organisational performance. The second class of factors as conflict source here also is:

Functional. Individuals in organisations have roles which are expected and sets of behaviour associated with their position. In theory, individuals are not expected to engage in any discretionary behaviour. Such specification would be consistent with organisational preferences for consistency and predictability. In practice, however, role specifications tend to be ambiguous and incomplete, and in their interaction with others, some individuals often feel dissatisfied with their role or position, or they may feel that their aspirations for higher positions are being frustrated. Inter-personal conflict can be accounted for, to a great extent, in terms of the incumbents' roles and their expectations in particular situations.

2.2.5 Inter-departmental Conflict

The third major cause of organisational conflict is structural. Organisations are designed around product lines, regions or technical specialties. These activities are assigned to departments that often have mutually exclusive structured interests and goals and that interact within a framework of scarce resources and task dependence. When resources are relatively fixed and when one department's gain is at the expense of another, conflict should be expected. If two sub-units in an organisational system have differentiated goals

and are functionally inter-dependent, conditions exist for conflict. Inter-dependence produces the need for collaboration, but it also presents occasions for conflict.

Other contextual factors which affect the interaction structure between departments and create the conditions for inter-departmental conflict include: different attitudes between line and staff units, organisational size (directly related to level of conflict) and standardisation (inversely related to conflict), physical or communicational barriers between departments, unequal access to authority, rewards or organisational resources and ambiguity or uncertainty in assigning tasks or rewards to different departments. These, then, are the sources of conflict situations in organisations. How a conflict situation will change over time, how its inter-related components will alter and the environment in which it occurs will respond, is dependent upon the manager's efforts to manage or influence it. This, in turn, is related to one's understanding of the source of a specific conflict situation.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

This study is hinged on the popular *conflict theory*, which was first purported by *Karl Max*. The theory states that society is in a state of perpetual conflict because of competition for limited resources. The theory holds that social order is maintained by domination and power, rather than by consensus and conformity. According to this theory, those with wealth and power try to hold on to it by any means possible, chiefly by suppressing the poor and powerless.

Conflict theory examines any social phenomenon through the lens that, there is a natural human instinct towards conflict. *Marx* is not saying that, conflict is good or bad, but rather, that it is an unavoidable aspect of human nature and that it helps to explain why things are the way they are. For example, conflict theory can be used to look at wars, violence, revolutions and forms of injustice and discrimination by explaining that there is a natural disparity in societies (and individuals) that causes these problems. A basic premise of conflict theory is that individuals and groups within society will work to try to maximise their own wealth and power (*Marxists Internet Archive. Manifesto of the Communist Party*. Accessed August, 10, 2020).

In the current research, where workplace (industrial) conflict is examined, the theory establishes the fact that, conflict is inherently inevitable either at, intra-personal inter-personal, inter-departmental levels because issues and opinions would obviously and always differ both at the top, middle and lower management levels. With this consciousness, managers at different levels of the organisation have to take necessary steps both to identify areas of conflict, mitigate and put strategies in place to manage them. This is because protracted conflict in an organisation or workplace setting tend to either slow down the pace of performance or outrightly cause a total breakdown in the flow of work.

This article thus provides the various ways of management of conflicts, whether at inter-personal, intra-personal, inter-departmental levels respectively. At the intra and

inter-personal levels, Blake & Mouton's five possible modes of conflict management, namely: withdrawal, smoothing, compromise, forcing and problem-solving comes handy, while at the inter-departmental level, the following methods are suggested: conflict avoidance (separating departments by re-locating them physically), regulating a conflict by introducing new rules and procedures, seeking a form of "legalistic" solution (by appealing to higher organisational authorities), using departmental representatives to reach a compromise agreement or seeking mediation or arbitration from an outside body.

2.4 Empirical Review

This study is made with robust empirical review on some of its vital aspects as follows:

2.4.1 Measuring and Managing solutions in Industrial Conflict Management

Ways of measuring and managing organisational conflict are as varied as its causes, origins and contexts. The purpose of conflict management, whether undertaken by the parties in conflict or whether involving the intervention of an outside party, is to affect the entire structure of a conflict situation so as to contain the destructive components in the conflict process (e.g. hostility, use of violence) and help the parties possessing incompatible goals to find some solutions to the conflict. Effective conflict management succeeds in minimising disruption stemming from the existence of a conflict, and providing a solution that is satisfactory and acceptable. We describe efforts directed towards containing or limiting some aspects of behaviour as *strategies of conflict settlement* and efforts directed towards the parties' attitudes, situations as well as behaviour as *strategies of conflict resolution*. Skilled managers are aware of these methods and techniques and know how to utilise them effectively.

All organisations, however simple or complex, possess a range of mechanisms or procedures for managing conflict. These are built into the organisational structure and are consciously employed by managers to influence the course and development of a conflict. The success or effectiveness of such procedures can be gauged by the extent to which they limit conflict behaviour and the extent to which they help to achieve a satisfactory solution. It is the contention of this article that strategies of conflict avoidance, conflict prevention or institutionalisation of conflict will change or replace co-ercive behaviours, but that only the injection of a behavioural social scientist, acting in a facilitative, non-directive and non-evaluative fashion, will achieve a resolution with respect to the basic issues, attitudes and structure of interaction. If managers care for optimal methods of conflict management, they should give their strongest support to a strategy that can end a conflict in a satisfactory and self-perpetuating manner. All this is not to contend, however, that conflict resolution is the immediate outcome of any intervention.

The outcome of a conflict depends upon many aspects of the conflict process prior to the efforts to manage it (e.g. issues in conflict, relative power of actors, degree of proximity etc.). What is being suggested here is that if four basic conflict outcomes may

be distinguished — namely: withdrawal, imposition or dominance, compromise and a creative, problem-solving resolution — then the most likely mode by which outcome may be reached pertains to the voluntary intervention of an outside consultant acting as a professional helper.

2.4.2 Measuring and Managing Intra-personal Conflict:

Intra-personal conflict is predicated upon an incongruity between individual needs and organisational requirements. Intra-personal conflict unfolds over time and manifests itself in a complex and multiform range of attitudinal and behavioural consequences. These may vary from psychosomatic consequences (e.g. frustration, emotional instability) to physical consequences (e.g. absenteeism, destructive behaviour). As such consequences are obviously correlated with decreased performance and work-motivation. Managing intra-personal conflict will help the individual to promote his capacity for adaptation and attain an equilibrium in his relationship with the organisation. Personal existence is, inevitably, punctuated by conflicts and other emotionally charged experiences.

Meanwhile, in *Henri Fayol's* suggested 14point' principles to managers of organisations on the best way possible to have an effective management of an organisation, he recommended, *inter-alia*, a subordination of individual interests for general or organisational interests. In other words, organisational interests should take prominence over and above personal or individual interests. However, where a person experiences an inner conflict and feels that he cannot master his situation, or change his environment, a number of methods of conflict management can be employed. These are conveniently divided into *cognitive* and *behavioural* strategies respectively. Cognitive strategies, often called *defense mechanisms*, help an individual to falsify, distort or deny a particular conflict. Cognitive strategies represent an attempt to control or manage negative and disturbing feelings associated with conflict and to allow an individual to carry on with his normal activities. Cognitive strategies include repression (an attempt to push conflict out of existence), rationalisation (hiding the truth from oneself), fantasy or even denial of reality. *Behavioural* strategies for coping with intra-personal conflict include escape, withdrawal and aggression (especially against convenient targets). It should be stated however, that, these strategies cannot resolve intra-personal conflict in any permanent way. Rather, they can be successful in the short-run. They can help an individual to reduce his level of anxiety and diminish his tension. They can prevent or avoid disruptive behaviour, but they cannot generate a solution. This can come about through the involvement of an expert consultant, acting in an accepting manner and encouraging the individual to evaluate his situation rationally and decide upon more effective responses.

Interventions in intra-personal conflicts entail consideration of substantive issues, discussions and self-observations, helping an individual to unload his burdensome thoughts and reactions and reorienting his thinking towards a more benevolent and self-

maintaining pattern of behaviour. The strength of this approach to conflict management is that it helps an individual to concentrate on his situation and on ways to evaluate alternatives that may have gone unnoticed. The consultant remains detached from an individual, but his intervention, listening, probing, interviewing and explicit confrontation of the conflict issues, sets the basis for self-diagnosis and improved performance. It eliminates distortion and increases self-knowledge. It is a method which seeks not merely an amelioration of the surface symptoms, but a successful change in the situational (e.g. reevaluating a conflict situation), attitudinal (e.g. reduced anxiety, increased self-esteem) and behavioural (e.g. stimulate productive behaviour) components of a conflict. Consultants may be internal to an organisation, or they may be introduced by an administrator when circumstances require it. They have several roles to play, all intended to aid a person to be more effective in his organisation.

What characterises all these roles are that they are enacted in an informal and flexible fashion and in a facilitative and diagnostic manner. Techniques which are congruent with implementing the consultant's role include: *facilitative techniques* (e.g. facilitating individual exploration and self-observation, giving information, advice, reassurance and encouragement), *behavioural modification techniques* (e.g. establish, through negative or positive reinforcement, contingencies of behaviour that should be decreased) and *cognitive techniques* (e.g. learn to undo old values and acquire a new perception of the self). When organisations experience difficulties as a result of intra-personal conflicts, managers would be well-advised to manage such conflicts by leading their organisations to seek professional help from persons who are trained to fulfil the role of organisational consultants. Successful organisational change does, after all, depend upon a strong commitment to conflict resolution.

2.4.3 Managing Inter-personal Conflict:

Inter-personal interactions are extra-ordinarily complex. Individuals are brought together and kept together because of personal attraction or complementary needs. A great deal of individual behaviour takes place in organisations (academic institutions such as universities, polytechnics, etc; hospitals, factories) in which they occupy various positions. Such positions are inter-locked or inter-dependent so that the attitudes and behaviours of one individual affect the attitudes and behaviours of another. Indeed, we may describe organisations as networks of repetitive, reciprocal and predictable interactions between individuals. Although persons in an organisation interact in a relatively consistent way along a stable-cooperative dimension (organisations develop norms to ensure stable interactions), inter-personal conflict is an essential aspect of organisational life.

The causes of inter-personal conflict in organisations can be ascribed to *personal* (interaction between dissimilar people maximises conflict potential), *perceptual* (individuals perceive an unfair allocation of organisational resources) and *functional* (conflicts arising from incompatible role requirements) differences respectively. On the

whole inter-personal conflict generates new ideas and work patterns, but when it is augmented by personal distrust, misperception and competition, it can very easily be transformed into destructive and costly behaviour. To avoid detrimental effects on individual as well as organisational functioning, managers need to identify the causes of inter-personal conflict and take appropriate action to deal with it.

Following *Blake & Mouton*, one can suggest five possible modes of conflict management, namely: withdrawal, smoothing, compromise, forcing and problem-solving. *Withdrawal* is an attempt to manage inter-personal conflict by avoidance. *Smoothing* involves emphasis of common, organisational interests and yielding by one or both parties. *Compromise* is an attempt to manage conflict by expecting each person to give up something. *Forcing* occurs when inter-personal conflict is managed in a fashion which compels one person to comply. *Problem-solving* is an attempt to achieve close collaboration and integrative decision-making between individuals.

Empirical support for the notion that problem-solving is the most effective method for dealing with the underlying problem and feelings of inter-personal conflict and generating a sound resolution may be obtained from a number of studies. *Lawrence & Lorsch* examined the use of the various conflict management methods in six organisations and concluded that the highest performing organisations used problem-solving to a greater extent than other organisations. *Burke* asked seventy-four (74) managers to describe the way they dealt with conflicts and, in comparing scores of constructive conflict management, found that the most effective ones used problem-solving methods (followed by smoothing and compromise in that order).

In a second study, he compared fifty-three (53) descriptions of effective conflict management. With fifty-three descriptions of ineffective conflict management from fifty-seven (57) managers and found that 58.5% of statements about effective conflict management related to problem-solving (followed by 24.5% for forcing and 11.3% for compromise). Organisations that can increase the use of problem-solving in inter-personal conflict can offer a better working experience, more constructive consequences and a more creative conflict resolution.

Problem-solving as a method of conflict management is not a common experience. A number of elements or conditions have to be present if it is to be realised. These conditions appear to be as follows: situational requirements (e.g. informality and flexibility of interactions, absence of time pressures, power symmetry etc.); attitudinal requirements (e.g. trust and confidence in each other, belief in conflict resolution rather than conflict avoidance etc.); perceptual requirements (e.g. individuals do not perceive threats or need to win or dominate the other), and behavioural requirements (e.g. free information, definition of issues, discussion of alternatives, exhaustive search for solutions, etc.). On the whole, these requirements are absent in dyadic conflict management where individuals' responses are as likely to escalate as to reduce conflict. The implication of this is that parties outside the dyad must intervene to alter the fundamental parameters of individual interactions in organisations and to introduce the conditions which are suitable to problem-solving.

The intervention of a behavioural consultant, either from within or outside the organisation, can achieve this goal. Consultation-based approaches to inter-personal conflict focus on understanding the psychological and operational environment of an individual, utilising behavioural scientists in a supportive-facilitative way and promoting the establishment of problem-solving. Interventions by behavioural consultants may take the form of offering theoretical inputs, e.g: providing individuals with conceptions about conflict; offering content observation, e.g: suggesting various outcome interpretations, and offering process observations, e.g: increasing productive interactions through openness, synchronisation of efforts, etc. They give individuals the freedom, opportunity and motivation to move away from rigid behaviour or from reiterating their positions as prescribed by organisational norms. They address themselves to the attitudinal and behavioural dimensions of interactions and in combining task and socio-emotional activities, they exemplify and help to establish the conditions of problem-solving. In contrast to other methods of conflict management, the intervention of a behavioural consultant accentuates the positive and highlights commonly held views of the actors.

The applications of this approach in the inter-personal sphere rest upon the following assumptions: Firstly, differences in perceptions are the main causes of inter-personal conflict; secondly, barriers to improved information prolong and aggravate a conflict, and thirdly, inadequate interactions between individuals prevent them from managing their conflicts constructively. Techniques of intervention in inter-personal conflict are closely related to these assumptions and include: perceptual, informational and interactional procedures respectively. Perceptual procedures involve identifying conflict issues, defining alternative issues, and "reality-testing". Informational procedures involve clarifying issues, encouraging and gathering information (through interviews, meetings or other instruments), and increasing frequency, openness and accuracy of communication. *Inter-actional* procedures entail regulating the pace of interaction, offering "process" observations to help individuals see how to be more effective, injection inputs in the form of concepts, models or principles which might be useful in understanding a conflict and helping in the design of implementation steps through which conflict resolution would be possible.

Through his intervention a behavioural consultant becomes the information-gathering instrument and a "resource person". Managers who are concerned about organisational change and more productive results would be well advised to be aware of the strengths as well as limitations of this approach to inter-personal conflict management.

2.4.4 Measuring and Managing Inter-departmental Conflict:

Conflict between departments is a natural consequence of organisational activities. As organisations move towards greater differentiation and complexity, as they change or adapt to new circumstances, the stage is set for incompatibility of goals or competition for scarce resources. The resulting conflict between departments may have uncertain

consequences for an organisation. On the one hand it may have a dysfunctional and counterproductive effect on the organisation, and on the other hand it can be highly functional and stimulate intra-organisational creativity. For conflict to be a vehicle for organisational growth and creativity, there must exist an appropriate method of conflict management between departments. A manager should know when he is faced with inter-departmental conflict and be informed of the processes for coping with it or resolving it.

Attitudes and Behaviours which Characterise Inter-departmental Conflict:

These can be described in terms of the following categories:

1. *Effects within Each Department.* When departments are in conflict, individual members tend to bury their differences and display greater loyalty to their department. Departments become more cohesive, more formal in their behaviour and more insistent upon individual conformity and accomplishment of prescribed tasks.

2. *Effects Between Departments.* Each department begins to experience perceptual distortions and to develop a strong self-image and a negative stereotype of the other. With the rise of prejudicial attitudes between departments there is an increase in hostility and a decrease in communication. Each department strives to enhance its own image and performance and to downgrade the other's. Under such conditions a conflict becomes a matter of victory or defeat, winning or losing. The fundamental significance of a win-lose dynamics is that it is, to some degree, intrinsic to any complex and stratified organisation, but that feelings of in-group versus out-group are especially strong in conflict situations. The attitudinal characteristics of such a pattern include a competitive orientation, the evaluative characteristics include antagonistic feelings and the behavioural characteristics include circumscribed interaction and distorted communication. The structural attributes of a conflict relationship must be considered in proposing a strategy of conflict management.

Traditional approaches to managing inter-departmental conflict emphasised such methods as: conflict avoidance (separating departments by relocating them physically); regulating a conflict by introducing new rules and procedures; seeking a form of "legalistic" solution (by appealing to higher organisational authorities); using departmental representatives to reach a compromise agreement or seeking mediation or arbitration from an outside body. Such conflict management methods may indeed produce an agreement. They may reduce the level of conflict behaviour between departments and even legitimise new levels of performance. They cannot, though, achieve a genuine conflict resolution because they merely reflect, perpetuate and occasionally aggravate a win-lose pattern of interactions.

Separation, withdrawal, institutionalisation, bargaining or legal approaches are essentially forming of a win-lose confrontation. They all start with a polarised, adversary orientation, in which each department tries to attain as much as possible by outsmarting the other. They bury a conflict, ignore it, produce power-based decisions or allow

departments to withdraw from it. They do not stimulate a search for conflict resolution. A range of new approaches to managing inter-departmental conflict may be suggested. These approaches acquire new significance because they become integral parts of an interaction process between departments, because they move away from win-lose type of strategies and because they can meet the need for conflict resolution more effectively. They are best summarised in terms of the social psychologists out of whose experiments these approaches evolved: Sherif *et al* suggest two broad strategies which are designed to increase co-operation between departments, facilitate mutual communication of needs and minimise the effects of hostility and negative attitudes. Both strategies are broad in their scope. Their targets of change is the organisational structure, but changes in individual attitudes and improvement in inter-personal competence may also be involved.

1. Locating a Conflict Common Enemy: When departments are engaged in a conflict, their incentive structure (i.e. of interest) may be changed and a mutual understanding as well as favourable attitudes may be promoted if they perceive a threat from a competing organisation. Shifting the level of inter-departmental conflict to the higher level of inter-organisational conflict will produce a new structural relationship within each organisation, a relationship that would harness departmental efforts and help them to compete more successfully against another organisation. The perception of an external threat or the identification of a common enemy supersedes any conflict that departments within an organisation may have. As a strategy of conflict management within an organisation, it operates on two levels. First, it affects individual attitudes, perceptions and feelings of trust and distrust. Second, it influences organisational role structure. It transforms interactions which are characterised predominantly by differentiation to accommodative interactions of a collaborative and integrated orientation.

2. Locating a Superordinate Goal: Superordinate goals are goals which are greatly desired by several departments and can only be achieved by combining the energies and resources of all involved. The introduction of a superordinate goal (e.g. developing a new product-line which would attract great customer demand) will create a cooperative context in which departments may interact on problems of joint interests, develop favourable attitudes and seek to achieve solutions that are mutually satisfactory. The introduction of a superordinate goal converts a conflict between departments to friendly interactions. The logic of introducing a superordinate goal is related to the very definition of a conflict. If conflict develops from the perception of incompatible goals, then cooperation would be promoted from common goals. To be successful in resolving inter-departmental conflict, a superordinate goal must be of such importance that departments can forget their differences and work together. It must involve several episodes considering the time dimension and it must be introduced by a third party.

The cumulative efforts of developing cooperative activities are an important determinant of successful conflict management between departments. *Blake & Mouton* accept that the most important aspect of a successful conflict management strategy is the

attempt to shift the behavioural and attitudinal components of a relationship from a competitive to a cooperative orientation. They do, however, suggest that both the common enemy and the superordinate goal approaches fall short of the need to achieve a genuine conflict resolution. This is because both can be seen as, one, being mainly temporary in character; two, both are primarily defensive, and three, both strategies may widen a conflict by externalising it. They offer an approach which emphasises consultation-based interventions, openness of communication, greater participation in decision-making and problem-solving interactions.

Blake & Mouton accept that traditional conflict management strategies can only deal with the behavioural component in conflict and bring about a patchwork solution. They suggest an approach to conflict management which involves interventions by organisational consultants (usually applied behavioural scientists), who have no vested interest in the conflict itself, but who have the competence and experience to generate a productive mode of conflict management. They avoid the pitfalls of adjudicating or evaluating which department is "right" or "wrong" (so often the hallmark of traditional conflict management). Nor do they seek to impose a solution. They intervene in order to generate creative thinking and to establish a problem-solving attitude. Consultation-based approaches to inter-departmental conflict accept conflict situations as inevitable and see them as useful occasions which permit departments to disagree and to work out the disagreements and ultimately to understand each other better.

The general functions of a consultant usually consist of: avoiding power-based outcomes; providing knowledge and skills regarding conflict processes; inducing an emotional-cognitive change as a prelude to collaborative interactions and providing a supportive, informal and learning environment well-suited to creating the requirements conducive to problem-solving. The technologies of consultation consist of educational activities and techniques, laboratory training observations, survey-feedbacks, questionnaires and interviews. The structure of consultation activities is so designed as to engage individuals as whole persons, not merely as segmented individuals striving to cope with their role demands.

Conflict Management, and indeed all forms of organisational behaviour, is determined by the interaction of *information, skills, values* and *situation*. Each of these factors acts as antecedents of some consultation-based activities. Behavioural consultants provide parties in conflict with more information and an understanding of the complexities of conflict interactions. They promote social interaction skills (which should be recognised as important as technical skills). They promote values of cooperation and help to create a situation in which people can interact freely and feel that they are as important to an organisation as are its resources or products. The sequence of consultation activities commences with upgrading individual skills and abilities, moves on to team-building activities and then to restructuring inter-group and inter-departmental activities. The institutionalisation of these activities consists of four steps. The first step — *bringing in the consultant* — represents an administrative response to a felt need for effective conflict management. The second step — *entry* — is associated with

various information-giving activities. The third step is aimed at *attitudinal change through data-feedback, team-training, sensitivity and T-Group training or Grid development*. The final step involves *a structural change in the relationship between departments and a move towards integrative interactions and conflict resolution*.

Effective conflict management is quite a major undertaking. There are not too many guideposts to indicate where we are or how to move towards conflict resolution. It is, therefore, a task which demands attention to attitudinal and behavioural elements, to outcome and emotional needs and to inter-personal as well as inter-departmental requirements. The intervention strategies of a behavioural consultant can, we have argued, move us towards that direction. We cannot be certain that the intended effects will always be achieved. We can suggest, with some certainty, that such interventions move us forward in the direction of effective conflict management and success in problem-solving. With this consideration in mind, managers should encourage such interventions and help to produce more effective programmes.

3) Methodology

The paper made use of primary and secondary sources of data collection, and the same was analysed with descriptive and content analyses. The primary sources utilised include questionnaire administration, conduct of in-depth interviews and direct observation. Three Hundred and sixty (360) questionnaires, being the sample size, representing 30% of the population of One Thousand and Two Hundred (1,200) purposively selected from four different organisations, namely: Joint Professionals Training Supports (JPTS) International, Ile-Ife, Osogbo, Ilesa, and Ikirun Centres (all in Osun State), Faculty of Administration, Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU), Ile-Ife, and Ibadan Electricity Distribution Company (IBEDC), Ilesa Business Hub. each accounting for One Hundred and Twenty (120) respondents' questionnaires.

In-depth interviews were conducted on Twenty (20) respondents in each of the organisations to corroborate information obtained from questionnaire administration. Those selected both for questionnaire administration and interviews were those deemed experienced and exposed enough in their respective organisations to provide adequate information to serve the purpose of this research and appreciate the fact that conflict is an issue in organisations and solution needed to be proffered to it especially if the goals of the organisations is to be realised.

4) Discussion on Findings

The study findings revealed that, the flow of work in organisations are affected adversely by protracted conflicts at workplace. Furthermore, companies' level of performance is grossly affected by it, with attendant multiplier effects on level of production, sales volume and rate of turnover per time.

The organisations utilised for this study, responded rather unanimously, that, there are some pockets of conflict, which they claimed have been affecting their performances. The

JPTS, Ile-Ife, Osogbo, Ilesa, and Ikirun Centres (all in Osun State), with relatively low workers' strength on each Centre basis, seem to have issues with their headquarters in Lagos. Their grievance centred around poor staff welfare. Virtually all lecturers in the identified Centres complained of poor remuneration and delay in its payment. They furthered complained that students are more or less pampered and placed over and above lecturers. The non-academic staff on their part complained of preferential treatment for their academic staff counterparts. Investigation revealed that, salaries which are made at the end of semester, are sometimes paid far into the next semester. Furthermore, evidence revealed that discipline is lacking, and students were in the habit of reporting lecturers to their respective Co-ordinators. Investigation further revealed that, even the headquarters planted spies in each Centre to make confidential reports to it on lecturers and Co-ordinators. On poor remuneration, the study revealed that lecturers, regardless of their qualifications, are paid #15,000 (Fifteen Thousand Naira only) per course per semester. This along with the other issues of lack of discipline and that lecturers and Coordinators are at the mercy of students, has caused conflict in the Centres identified.

In the Faculty of Administration of OAU, Ile-Ife, there has been a rather protracted case of inter-personal conflict. There could be inter-departmental issues, among the faculty's four departments (Accounting & Management, International Relations, Public Administration, and Local Government Studies) the current study is on inter-personal issues within the faculty: lecturers versus lecturers, lecturers versus other staff, lecturers versus students, Heads of Departments (HODs) versus other lecturers, and students. In particular, the study examined inter-personal conflict among lecturers across departments, the cumulative effect of which had been strained relationship, names calling, and above all low or reduced productivity of individual lecturers.

The IBEDC, Ilesa Business Hub, though a private sector organisation, is serving members of the public of Ilesa and its environs. The study revealed that this dual-purpose status of the organisation, is the cause of the conflict with the public. Whereas the sector has been privatised, the members of the public still expect it to function as a public utility organisation as in the days of ECN, NEPA and PHCN. Respondents revealed that, sometime in 2018, there was outbreak of violence between some segments of the city and the power organisation resulting in wanton destruction of the organisation's valuables and beating up of some members of staff.

Under the prevailing influence of behaviourism, inter-personal conflict management has been directed mainly towards the behavioural components of a conflict situation. Attitudes and perceptions have been considered beyond the realm of conflict management. As a result of this, conflict management has tended to force individuals to choose between fixed and simplified behavioural alternatives, defined in terms of two rigid behavioural goals, winning or losing. The choices and incentives associated with this orientation of victory versus defeat were strongly constrained, forcing individuals into relatively primitive modes of interaction and providing managers with an untrustworthy vehicle for potential conflict management. Of the five methods of managing inter-personal conflict, it appears that problem-solving is the only method that is directed towards the attitudinal, situational and behavioural components of conflict. It is the only method that does not focus on relatively automatic,

unthinking responses. It is the only method which seeks to utilise higher mental processes to achieve a high-quality, integrative and satisfying outcome.

5) Concluding Remarks

Organisations are social entities segmented into hierarchies of departments and individuals. The basic realities of organisational life cannot but stimulate comparisons, competitions and conflicts between departments and individuals. Conflict is an omni-present feature at each of these organisational levels. Since conflict may have functional as well as dysfunctional consequences, it is essential that managers explore various methods and techniques of conflict management. Effective conflict management is indispensable if co-ordinated efforts and productive achievements are to result. I have suggested above that the planned intervention by behavioural scientists represents the most effective method since it can produce organisational change and a sense of personal accomplishment. A wide range of intervention activities may be utilised to deal with conflicts at various organisational levels.

It is however beyond the scope of this work to provide a manual that can possibly foresee all the contingencies or to evaluate the effectiveness of different types of intervention. Rather, the paper purported to view conflict management as an integral part of an organisation. Managers should be able to ascertain the presence of a conflict, its basic sources, the level at which it manifests itself, its degree of intensity and the ways of furthering the objectives of conflict resolution.

From a pragmatic viewpoint manager should direct their attention to four issues, namely: Is there a conflict? Where is the conflict? Does it require to be managed? How best to implement an effective conflict management strategy? With these issues in mind, the main features of this article may be summarised by developing a conceptual framework for conflict management in organisations. Conflict and conflict in organisations have only recently begun to receive the attention it deserves. In this article I have sought to address ourselves to the determinants of conflict and the effectiveness of different methods of measuring and managing solution in industrial conflicts and management. conflict.

The article finally concluded that, though industrial conflicts are said to be inevitable, efforts and strategies can be put in place by top management of organisations to mitigate and checkmate their occurrences

6) Recommendations/ Suggestions for Further Research.

Though conflicts can be inevitable, and as this study pointed out, for purposes of peace and effective work performance, efforts have to be made to stem the tide of conflicts. The following suggestions which also serve as points for further research, are recommended:

- The organisation's goals should be clearly communicated and understood by all workers.
- Lines of authority and responsibility should be clearly defined and understood.
- Effective workers' welfare should be put in place.
- Personal interests should not be raised above organisational goals and interests.

- Private organisations should have and operate a functional staff welfare scheme.
- Workers should be made to undergo trainings where they will understand such things as individual differences and other work ethics.
- There should be adequate public awareness on the present status of especially the Distribution sub-sector of the electricity industry.
- Capable hands on conflict management matters should be consulted to handle workplace conflicts.
- Work remuneration should be based on individual merits of staff and should be on equal ratings with their colleagues elsewhere.
- Managers of organisations, who should double as Behavioural Scientist, should study and understand workers' behaviours and adopt interim measures to mitigate workplace crisis.

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