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TRENDING CONFLICT RESOLUTION STRATEGIES AND HARMONIOUS WORK ENVIRONMENT IN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN DELTA STATE

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ABSTRACT

Conflict is an inevitable aspect of human interaction, and the workplace is no exception. Unmanaged conflicts can lead to decreased productivity, increased turnover and a toxic work environment. This paper examines the trending conflict resolution strategies that fosters a harmonious work environment in tertiary institutions in Delta State Nigeria. The descriptive survey research design was adopted and sample of 400 respondents was drawn from population of all lecturers in four tertiary institutions in Delta State using stratified random sampling technique. A questionnaire titled 'Trending Conflict Resolution Strategies and Harmonious Work Environment Questionnaire (TCRSHWEQ)' was used as instrument for data collection while the data was analyzed using mean score and ANOVA. Some trending conflict resolution strategies were identified to include mediation, separation when angry, compromise to mention but a few. The literature highlights the importance of emotional intelligence, open communication, and mediation in resolving workplace conflicts. The findings of the study provide insights for organizations seeking to create a positive and productive work environment. The paper concluded that since conflict could not be avoided, efforts should be made to check, manage and resolve it before it gets to the destructive stage.

Keywords*:* Conflict Resolution; Harmonious Work Environment; Tertiary Institutions

Introduction

The tertiary education sector in Delta State, Nigeria, is a microcosm of the broader societal landscape, with diverse stakeholders, interests, and power dynamics. As such, conflicts inevitably arise, threatening to disrupt the academic environment and undermine the pursuit of knowledge. However, the effective management and resolution of these conflicts are crucial in fostering a harmonious work environment, promoting productivity, and enhancing the overall quality of education. This discussion explores the trending conflict resolution strategies and their impact on creating a harmonious work environment in tertiary institutions in Delta State, with a view to identifying best practices and recommendations for sustainable conflict management.

Conflicts are found at every stage of life. Individuals, groups, association, clubs, societies, local, national and even world communities do experience conflicts in one way or the other. Conflicts exists for one reason or the other. In every human interaction and organizational behaviours, conflicts are bound to occur. Conflict in the words of Salleh and Adulpakdee (2012) involves individuals or group disagreement, struggles, disputes, quarrels or even physical fight and wars. It ranges from work issues or responsibilities, power, authority and ethics to interpersonal matters, like; misunderstanding, difference of opinion and poor communication between two groups or persons. In other words, conflict is inevitable in social organizations such as the family, legal health, political and educational institutions among others.

Conflict simply put means to clash or be involved in a fight or struggle over a competitive means or ends. Hornby (2004) asserts that conflict is a situation in which people or groups are involved in serious disagreement or argument in which there are opposing ideas, opinions, feeling or situation of difficulty of choices. Conflict is usually the result of long process of agitation-disharmony, insensitivity to demand and neglect of warning signals that are either manifest or latent (Onyema 2016). It could be in form of insult, name-calling, character deformation or black-mailing, false accusations, withdrawal of services, salaries, fringe benefits or incentives, strike, suspension, sudden transfer, demotion, termination of appointment, deprivation, non-allocation of courses to lecturers, marginalization, and boycott of classes, open violence or killings, among others.

Mohammad and Raman (2011) opined that conflict cannot be evaded even in education as schools and colleges are part of organizations. If conflict that arises in tertiary institutions are not resolved or properly managed, it will affect the teaching and non-teaching staff and the students by creating an unhealthy psychological environment for learning (Onyema, 2024). Organizational conflicts can occur between department and department, faculty and faculty, school and school. It may also be between the management and the Chief executives, Vice Chancellor, Rector, Provost, Head teacher, staff and student and of course, the school community. Conflict continues to be a factor in academic life. In the school environment, conflict is seen as a human and social phenomenon which creates hostility and hinders educational progress. According to the functionalist theory, society is made up of different social system or institution which relates to maintain the survival of the entire system. Therefore, every part of society must contribute to the survival or stability of the system. Failure to contribute renders such part ineffective a possibly non

survival since all parts of the society draws its surviving link by being relevant in the development of the entire whole. The school is a society of its own and therefore expected that each part of the school, be it student, teachers, management staff and the non-teaching staff should work together to maintain a harmonious work environment devoid of conflict for the school society to thrive effectively and achieve its aim. During the process of maintaining a harmonious work environment, some level of undisputed and uninterrupted interaction between groups and individuals occurs in the cause of this interaction, conflicts, therefore, is bound to arise.

Sociologies believe in the universality of conflicts, they also maintain that as much as conflict cannot be avoided, that it can be managed and possibly be resolved before it can get to destructive stage (Otite, 2000). Since conflict is very difficult to be eliminated in our daily interaction, it becomes expedient that strategies be put in place to check, manage and resolve it especially in Nigerian tertiary institutions. Talcott Parsons opined that social Institutions must resist any changes that are fundamental aspect of the entire society. This being the case, it becomes expedient to regulate all the different parts of the system into coherent, cohesive whole which may likely be achieved by establishing common values, beliefs and norms for such society. Conflict therefore, emanate through the process of maintaining these laws as some persons will ordinarily violate certain norms and values. Since people working in tertiary institutions have differences in cultural norms and values, beliefs and habits, customs and morals amongst others, conflict resolution education strategies therefore become imperative. By implication, there must be a synergy between the national norms, values and tradition with the types of education given to citizens of the nation.

Unresolved conflict can lead to job dissatisfaction, high absenteeism and low turnover, prolonged disruption of activities and lack of concerted effort by organizational members. According to Salem (1993), conflict cannot be readily resolved. Therefore, efforts should be made to manage it since it cannot be avoided. He also maintained that conflict can be harmful to employee satisfaction and job performance if it becomes excessive and unmanageable. Conflict situation can disrupt progress and development of the groups involved if it is not resolved.

In the school organization, unresolved or ill-managed conflict has implications for educational management and the entire school system. In an earlier study, Igbinedion (2015) found that conflict in the school organization has the following effects: rumormongering, factions within the school system, crisis, disruption of teaching and learning, distortion of the school system and eventually ill-attainment of school and national educational goals.

Conflict in the work place is a painful reality and a key reason for poor productivity and frustration. Conflict does not magically go away and only get worse when ignored. Negative attitudes occur repeatedly over time and can cause people to engage in physical combat, cause bodily harm to each other. In many cases, conflict occurs at the top hierarchy of the organization in these situations, some kind of intervention is needed.

Every organization especially the educational institutions such as tertiary institutions are established for the purpose of giving her

students a sound and qualitative education to enable them function effectively and efficiently in an environment in which they find self-fulfilling and attain self-actualization, (FRN, 2004) for this purposes to be achieved therefore, a suitable work environment should be put in place for both teaching and the non-teaching staff to enable them have a conductive social environment for learning. Conflict in the workplace is inevitable, but does not have to bring down moral of affect productivity. There is the need therefore to design effective measures for resolving conflicts. Smith (2013) sees conflict resolution as a process of attempting to find solution or settle a dispute.

This process may take different patterns which include; the use of force, or authority of the school organization to enforce peace and establishment of relationships and agreement among groups (Obegi & Nyamboga, 2008).

The fact that Smith (2013) identified ten strategies for resolution of conflict in tertiary institutions to include:

(i) When angry, separate yourself from the situation and take time to cool out
(ii) Attack the problem, not the person, start with a compliment.
(iii) Never jump into conclusions or make assumptions about what another is feeling.
(iv) Forget the past and stay in the present.
(v) Negotiation and
(vi) Mediation among others;

The author also opined that these strategies have not totally resolved conflict in tertiary institution.

Moreso, there are other conflict resolution strategies for effective harmonious work environment according to Onyema (2024) to include the following;

1. Encouraging Open Communication; fostering an environment where team members feel comfortable expressing their thoughts and concerns without fear of judgment or retribution [1].
2. Embracing Constructive Feedback; recognizing the value of feedback as a tool for improvement, rather than viewing it as criticism or a personal attack [1].
3. Seeking Mediation and Collaboration; utilizing neutral third-party facilitators to help bridge gaps and encourage dialogue [1].
4. Practicing Emotional Intelligence; Developing self-awareness, empathy, and self-control to navigate conflicts effectively. This is the ability to recognize and understand emotions in oneself and others developing emotional intelligence is crucial for effective conflict resolution.as it enables individuals to navigate complex emotional situations, empathize with others, and manage their own emotions (Jordan & Troth 2004)
5. Promoting a Culture of Respect and Inclusivity; creating an environment where every individual is valued, heard, and treated with fairness and dignity
6. Compromising; Finding mutually acceptable solutions that balance competing interests
7. Accommodating; prioritizing the needs of others to maintain harmony, but being mindful of potential long-term consequences
8. Avoiding; sidestepping conflicts temporarily, but addressing them proactively to prevent escalation

The problem of this study therefore put in question form is; What trending conflict resolution strategies can be used to bring about a harmonious work environment in tertiary institutions in Delta State.

Research Questions

Two research questions were raised to guide the study. They were:

i. What are the causes of conflict in tertiary institutions in Delta State?

ii. What are the trending conflict resolution strategies for effective harmonious work environment in tertiary institutions in Delta State?

Hypothesis

A hypothesis was formulated:

1: There is no significant different between the mean response of male and female teachers on the conflict resolution strategies adopted in Delta State.

Methodology

The descriptive survey design was adopted in this study. According to Backstrom & Hash in Achugbu (2010), a descriptive survey design is gathering information about a larger number of people by interviewing a few of them. The population of the study comprised all lecturers in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. A sample size of 400 respondents which include 50 male and 50 female lecturers from each of the four tertiary institution in Delta State namely: Federal College of Education (Technical), Asaba, Delta State Polytechnic, Ogwashi-Uku, Delta State University, Abraka and Federal University of Petroleum Resources Effurun. The instrument for data collection was the questionnaire developed by the researchers titled' 'Lecturers Perception of Trending Conflict Resolution Strategy Questionnaire (LPTCRSQ). The LPTCRSQ was divided into two section A and B. section A elicited demographic information from respondents; while Section B contained twenty (20) items measuring the factors and variables of the study. The LPTCRSQ was responded to in the four points modified likert scale rating as Strongly Agreed (4 points), Agreed (3 points), Disagree (2 points), and Strongly Disagree (1 point).

The LPTCRSQ was face validated by two experts in measurement and evaluation department while the reliability was calculated at 0.72 with a pretest administered on 50 lecturers and computed using the Pearson product moment correlation. The data was analyzed using a descriptive statistical tool of mean and Anova was used to test the hypothesis.

A mean score of 2.50 was adopted as bench mark for decision that means any mean score rating below 2.50 will be rejected and mean score of 2.50 and above was adopted.

Research Question 1: what are the causes of conflicts in tertiary institutions in Delta State as perceived by the lecturers?

Table 1: Showing Mean Response on Causes of Conflict in Tertiary Institutions

S/N	ITEMS	X	DECISION
1.	Struggle for resources	3.67	Accept
2.	Ego centricism (pride/selfishness)	2.76	Accept
3.	Ethnocentricism (tribalism)	2.56	Accept
4.	Religion bigotry	1.09	Reject
5.	Assertion	3.08	Accept
6.	Struggle for recognition	1.98	Reject
7.	Greed	3.65	Accept
8.	Lack of respect for others views	1.83	Reject
9./	Lack of self-control	2.23	Reject
10.	Lack of self-respect	1.28	Reject

Table one shows the result obtained on the analysis of the factors measuring causes of conflicts in tertiary institutions. The result indicated that the respondents were of the view that struggle for resources, egocentricism (pride/selfishness), ethno-centricism (tribalism), assertion and greed constitute a source of conflict in tertiary institutions but the respondents were of a contrary view. This may perhaps be due to the hegemony of religious affiliation within the geographical boundary of the population from which the sample of the study was drawn. Equally, the respondents did not also consider that struggle for recognition, lack of respect for others' views, lack of self-control and lack of self respect constituted sources of conflict in tertiary institutions.

Research Question 2: What are the effective conflict resolutions strategies adopted by teachers for effective harmonious work environment in tertiary institutions in Delta State?

Table2: Showing Mean Response on Conflict Resolutions Strategies

S/N	ITEMS	X	DECISION
11.	Separation when angry	3.80	Accept
12.	Attacking the problem	2.56	Accept
13.	Making assumption	1.53	Reject
14.	Negotiation	2.04	Reject
15.	Mediation	3.76	Accept
16.	Taking sides in conflict	1.93	Reject
17.	Effective communication within the organization	3.69	Accept
18.	Discussion with the other party in conflict	2.28	Reject
19.	Compromise	2.92	Accept
20.	Use of force and intimidation	1.73	Reject

Table two shows the result obtained on the analysis of the factors measuring conflict resolution strategies in tertiary institutions. The result indicated that the respondents were of the view that among the factors measured, separation when angry, mediation, attacking the problem, effective communication within the organization and compromise are strategies for effective conflict resolutions within tertiary institutions.

Although it was expected that negotiation and discussion with the other party in conflict should be utilized for conflict resolution, the respondents were of a contrary view. The respondents did not also consider that making assumption on issues of conflict, taking sides in conflict as well as the use of force and intimidation should be applied in conflict resolution in tertiary institutions.

Hypothesis: There is no significant difference between the mean response of male and female teachers on the conflict resolution strategies adopted by teachers in tertiary institutions in Delta State.

Table 3: ANOVA Showing Mean Difference in Gender Perception of Conflict Resolution Strategies

Perception of Conflict Resolution Strategies		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Gender	Between Groups (Combined)	.625	1	.625	2.516	.114
	Within Groups	98.952	398	.249		
	Total	99.577	399			

0.05 sig. level

Table three shows the one-way analysis of variance testing the difference in perception of conflict resolution strategies between male and female lecturers. The result showed that with degree of freedom=1, (F=2.515 > 0.05) level of significance. We can therefore reliably say that there is no significant difference between the mean response of male and female lecturers on the conflict resolution strategies adopted by lecturers in tertiary institutions in Delta State. This means that there is a general consensus between the male and female lecturers on the strategies that should be adopted for conflict resolution in tertiary institutions.

Discussion

It was the opinions of the teachers of tertiary institutions in Delta State that the causes of conflicts include struggle for resources, ethnocentricism and greed, among others. The finding of this study is in agreement with those of Salleh and Adulpakdee (2012) who identified causes of conflict to include group disagreement, struggle, disputes, quarrels or even physical fighting and wars. The lecturers in tertiary institutions in Delta State reported that conflict resolutions strategies adopted by them include separation when angry, mediation, attacking the problem, effective communications with in the organization and compromise. This finding is interesting in that they are good conflict resolution strategies as identified by Smith (2013).

More so, from the data analysis, it was indicated that male and female lecturers had no significant difference on the conflict resolution strategy adopted by them in tertiary institutions in Delta State. This may be explained from the point of view that both sexes perform the same type of work, face similar challenges and apply similar strategies to cope with conflicts in their work environment.

Conclusion

The exploration of trending conflict resolution strategies and their impact on creating a harmonious work environment in tertiary institutions in Delta State has revealed the importance of adopting proactive and inclusive approaches to conflict management. By embracing strategies such as Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR), restorative justice, and interest-based bargaining, institutions can reduce conflict escalation, promote constructive dialogue, and foster a culture of respect and empathy.

To sustain a harmonious work environment, tertiary institutions in Delta State must prioritize

1. Institutionalizing conflict resolution mechanisms
2. Building trust through transparency and accountability
3. Promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion
4. Encouraging open communication and feedback

5. Providing training and capacity-building programs for staff and students

By implementing these recommendations, tertiary institutions in Delta State can create a conducive environment for learning, teaching, and research, ultimately enhancing the quality of education and promoting societal development.

The findings of the study implied that the respondents agreed that the factors so stated caused conflict in tertiary institutions in Delta State. Therefore, the application of the strategies outlined would go a long way to resolve conflict thereby creating a conducive and harmonious work environment.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study the following recommendations were made

- There is need to create a condusive work environment which permits members of the school environment to interact freely with one another to avoid suspicion.
- There should be free flow of communication so that people will not misunderstand each other.
- Efforts should also be made to satisfy people's basic needs and also ensure equitable distribution of resources.
- Efforts should be intensified by government and administrators to check, manage and resolve conflict before it gets to destructive stage.

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