

## SOCIETAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL CONFLICT: THE WAY FORWARD

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### Abstract

*Conflict is an inevitable aspect of human interactions, this phenomenon which is inherent in every socio-cultural, economic and political settings is characteristic of group interactions. However, depending on how it is handled, it could either be constructive, or could be destructive. From the time of independence, Nigeria has had to contend with various forms of intra-communal and inter-communal conflicts, ranging from religious, ethnic, political conflicts to trade union, labour struggles and other forms of industrial and economic conflicts. Societies all over the world apparently experience relations of some type at various times. This is due to the fact that social relations whether formal, semi-formal or informal, contain elements of the basic two forms of social interaction; (i) cooperation and competition (ii) certain forms of competitive relations that bring about conflicts. The way and manner by which conflicts are resolved, whether or not they are resolved depends a great deal on the strength of the social structures, institutions, customs and practices of a society.*

### Introduction

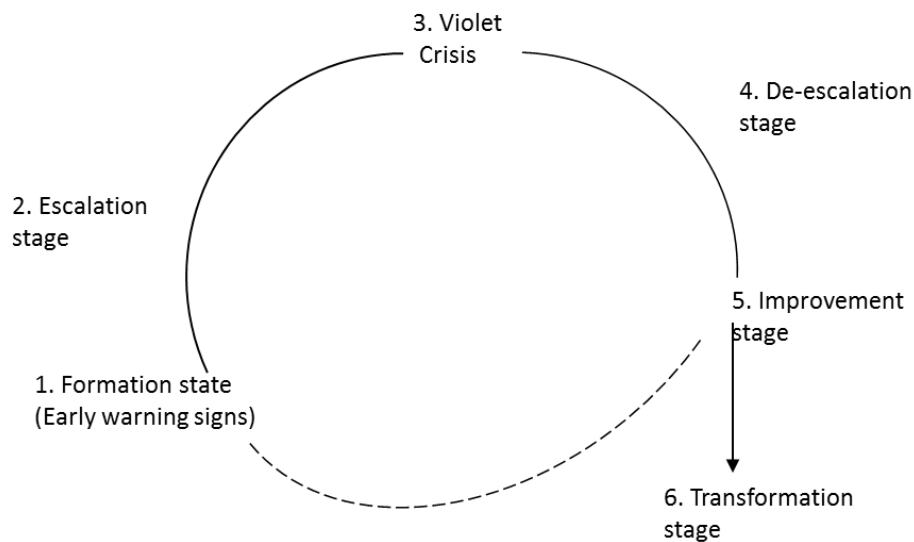
According to Francis (2006) in Anyadike (2009) defines conflict as the pursuit of incompatible interests and goals by different groups. Thus conflict is bound to occur and reoccur as a result of differences arising from human interaction in daily economic, social and political activities. In the opinion of Otite and Albert (2001), conflict is the consequence of the pursuit of divergent interests, goals and aspirations by individuals and groups in defined social and physical environments. According to Okungbowa and Epelle (2011) conflict denotes clash, confrontation, contention, strife, battle, struggle, and controversy, quarrel which may be violent or non-violent. Conflict occurs in various forms and different dimensions. Imo (2008) classifies conflicts in terms of causes and effects. According to him, these clashes are communal, institutional, ethnic, family, gender, intergenerational, interpersonal, intra or inter-group, labor, armed, environmental, technological or personality.

However, Adeyanju (2004) groups conflict into intra-national, and international. In all one thing is clear. These various forms of conflicts are interwoven with no clear boundaries. For instance an ethnic conflict may be intergenerational while intergroup conflict may also be religious or political. Finally conflict is inevitable in any social interactions or human relationships, the challenge is its management, control or resolution, prevention, although offer desirable may not be possible at all times. In the words of Zartman (1991) in Okolie (2009).

Conflict is an inevitable aspect of human interaction, an unavoidable concomitant of choices and decisions. Although conflict is inherent in decisions even when there is only one person, social conflict is necessarily brought on by the presence of several actors and compounded by several choices. It cannot be avoided. The problem then, is not to court the frustrations of seeking to remove inevitability but rather of trying to keep conflicts in bound. Conflicts can be prevented on some occasions and managed on others, but resolved only if the term is taken to mean the satisfaction of apparent demand rather than the total eradication of the underlying sentiments, memories and interests.

According to Fisher et al (2000) cited in Okolie (2009) there are five general stages of conflicts pass through. At its primary level conflict is a competition of interest satisfaction, often expressed through positioning in the words of Uwazie et al (2008). Each conflict has specific dimensions and processes. The stages include the following;

1. Pre-conflict (formation stage): This primarily refers to a period when goals between parties are incompatible which could lead to open conflict. At this stage communication between the parties has deteriorated but conflict situation becomes largely latent.
2. Confrontation Stage (escalation stage): At this stage, the conflict has become manifest or open. It is characterizes by occasional fighting, low level violence, search for allies by parties, mobilization of resources, strained relations and polarization.
3. Stage of Crisis: This represents the peak of the conflict. In violent conflict, this represents the stage of war and intense fighting, leading to killings, injuries, large scale population displacements and use of small arms and light weapons etc. thereby leading to break down of law and order, services are virtually disrupted and people begin to experience discomfort due to lack of water, food, electricity and other essentials goods and services.
4. Outcome Stage (de- escalation stage): Indeed, all conflicts naturally pass through this stage. With the outcome of the conflict tilting in the favor of one party, or even if a cease fire was declared or negotiated, the critical issue hence forth is that the violence is decreased, which allows rooms for some discussions to commence, or alternative means of settling conflict.
5. Post Conflict (improvement stage): Here, violence has either ended or significantly reduced, and the parties have gone past the crisis stage. In the words of Fisher et al (2000) the underlying causes of the conflict are addressed; and that if not properly tackled, the conflict cycle may be re-enacted and a return to the pre-conflict stage, with consequent re-eruption of violence, become a possibility.
6. Transformation stage: All causes of conflicts have been removed at this stage and reconciliation has occurred. This stage is the most difficult to attain in any conflict situation, though desirable, attainable and accomplishable.



**Figure 1:**

**Source: Conflict Resolution Stakeholders Network (Crescent) Training Manual 2001]**

### **Well Managed Conflicts in Nigeria:-**

When conflicts are well managed it could lead to mutual satisfaction of the parties, with some qualitative development in the relationship or society. For instance, Ugbo-Makin conflict in Ilaje of Ondo State resulted into the development of the two communities, while Okrika – Eleme conflict resulted into creation of Local Government (Okrika L.G.A and Tai Eleme L.G.A), and today Tai- Eleme, each stands as a local government. In the case of Kabba -Ijumu conflict this lead to:

- (1) The Chiefs regaining their autonomy.
- (2) A grade courts was approved for different districts.
- (3) Political and judicial autonomy were granted and some obvious administrative problems were solved.

Just to mention view cases.

### **Types of Conflicts:**

In the words of Uwazie et al (2008) five general categories are known. This includes;

- a. **Data Conflict:** this occurs when people lack information necessary to make wise decisions, are misinformed, disagree on which data is relevant, interpret information differently, or have competing assessment procedures.
- b. **Relationship Conflict:** Occurs because of the presence of strong negative emotions, misperceptions or stereotypes, poor communication or miscommunication or repetitive negative behaviors. Relationship problems often fuel disputes and lead to an unnecessary escalating spiral of destructive conflict and emotions for acknowledgement is one effective.

- c. Interest Conflict or (Psychological needs): This is caused by competition over perceived incompatible needs. When one or more of the parties believe that in order to satisfy his or her needs (e.g. habits, customs, culture) the needs and the interest of the opponents must be sacrificed.
- d. Structural Conflict: are caused by forced by forces external to the people in dispute. Limited physical resources or authority, geographic constraints (distance or proximity), time (too little or too much), organizational changes and so on and so forth can make structural conflict seem like a crisis. It can be helpful to assist parties in conflict to appreciate the external forces and constraints bearing upon them.
- e. Value Conflict: Values are beliefs that people use to give meaning to their lives. Values explain what is good or bad, right or wrong, just or unjust. Differing values need not cause conflict. Value conflicts are caused by perceived or actual incompatible belief systems.

Other forms of Conflicts are;

- f. Intra-personal Conflict: This type of conflict occurs within an individual. Examples of such are use of time, choice of partner, moral questions, goals and aspirations.
- g. Inter-Personal Conflict: This refers to conflicts between two or more individuals over an issue.
- h. Intra-Group Conflict: This refers to conflict between individuals or factions within a group.
- i. Inter-Group Conflict: This refers to conflicts between groups such as clubs, class versus class, family versus family etc.
- j. National Conflict: This refers to conflict within a nation involving different groups within the nation. This could be inter-ethnic, inter-religious or competition for resources.
- k. International Conflicts: This refers to conflicts between nations. This could be for ideological reasons, territorial claims and political competition.

**Objective:** The objective of this paper is to identify various types of conflicts, stages of conflict, its causes with focus on work place conflict and the ways to managing conflict.

**Literature review:** The term conflict is taken from the Latin word “conflicts” meaning “strike together”. Conflict also means contradiction arising from differences in interests, ideas, ideologies, orientation, beliefs, perceptions and tendencies. Although, conflict is normal, natural and an inevitable phenomenon in any interactive situation of human life, contradictions exist at all levels of the society. According to Wolf (2006) in Okungbowa and Epelle (2001), conflict is used to describe “a situation in which two or more actors pursue incompatible, yet from their individual perspective, entirely just goals”. He further opined that conflict is as a result of struggle for power and material gain by leaders and followers alike. Due to such vested interests, the conflict entrepreneurs prefer conflicts to cooperation and privilege violence over negotiations. The material value or economic viability of the territory is also vital in conflict dynamics. For example, if the territory is rich in natural resources such as oil, gold, diamond, timber or if there are cultural attachments to the territory, there would be more stakes in it.

Imohigbe (2003) opined that conflict represents a condition of disharmony within an interaction process usually as a result of a clash of interests between the parties involved in

Some of relationship. In the words of Asaju (2004) that virtually, every country is tormented by one form of violent conflict or another. Violence is not restricted to developing countries alone. America and Europe are also caught in the web of violence. These developed countries that are

Hitherto notable for peaceful existence and security, are today scared of terrorists attacks as the culture of violence pervades all countries. Economic and industrial dimensions of conflict are caused by the incessant industrial resentments by labor over unfavorable government's economic and industrial policies which have been the major source of disharmony in the system.

In the words of Elaigwu (2005) cited in Joshua (2013) incessant violent conflict ranges from religious, identity, to communal. He identified 17 major violent conflicts in Nigeria from May 1985 to May 1<sup>st</sup> 1999. However, from May 31<sup>st</sup> 1999 to June 2005, he identified at least 121 cases of conflicts in Nigeria. He attributed the sudden increase in violent conflicts in the country to: a strong central government; popular agitation for decentralized structures, dissatisfaction with the distribution of available resources, communal conflicts and demands by some sub-national groups for self-determination.

### **Cause of Conflicts**

There may be multiple causes of conflicts. These multiple causes which are often rooted in history, lead to violence due to a variety of catalysts. Some of these catalysts in the case of Nigeria, as in many ethnic groups are land, political marginalization, religion, environmental degradation and cultural hegemony.

1. Incompetent management styles.
2. Unwilling to obey rules attitude of the management to create the right arena for open discussions with aggrieved parties as early as notice of labour discontent have been served the management or the government.
3. Governments poor policy choices, and as a consequence of government's failure to respond to and respect existing agreements already signed with labour unions according to Oghenekaro (2013), Gani (2013), Issa-fagee (2013)
4. Enactment of arbitrary laws aimed at breaking the solidarity and power of trade unions as it is the case of the trade union act of 2004 cited by Albert and Yahaya (2013).
5. Struggle over resources, competitions, psychological needs, power, values and absence of information.
6. Status struggle (Need for esteem is basic to most human beings, this is why people struggle for positions of higher status and prestige when in a group setting. For instance between Governors and their deputies.
7. Inter-personal or inter-group or at both arenas part of cause conflicts, competition, personality clashes (whether between individual organizations or even nations)
8. Differing interests:- conflict occurs when individual workers "fight" for their personal goals and ignore organizational goals and organizational well-being.
9. Different values:- every workplace is made up of individuals who see the world differently. Conflicts occur when there is a lack of acceptance and understanding of these differences. Behavioral difference and personality clashes can cause conflict among friends.

10. Poor communication: - different communication styles can lead to misunderstanding between employees or between employees and managers.
11. Scarce resources: - too often employees feel they have to compete for available resources in order to do their job. In a resource scarce environment, thus cause conflict despite the awareness of how scarce the resources might be.
12. Poor performance: - when one or more individuals within a work unit are not performing or working up to potential- and this is not addressed, conflict is inevitable.
13. Personality clashes: - all work environments are made up of differing personalities. Unless colleagues understand and accept each other's approach to work and problem-solving.
14. On a general note environmental conflicts also exist. For instance, environmental conflict induced by environmental degradation could manifests as political, social, ethnic, religious, territorial conflicts. There could also be conflicts over resource use, resource control, resource allocation or national interests in whom the physical structures or the two parties to the conflict fail to respond to one another. For example the toxic waste deposit at koko in Delta state in 1988. Pollution by solid waste, oil spillage or industrial effluent as in Niger Delta region, Ikeja, Ibadan and Port Harcourt cited in Phil-Eze (2009).
15. Other causes of conflict include conflict due to oil deposits between Nigerian and Cameroon over the oil rich Bakassi-Peninsula.
16. Conflict over natural resources which is found in the Niger Delta region. Such cases include the Ijaw-itsekiri conflict in the oil city of Warri, Itsekiri-Urhobo, the Ogoni-Andoni conflict, etc.

#### **Why Conflicts Re-occur in Nigeria:**

In the opinion of Imobighe (2003), conflict seems insurmountable in Nigeria because Nigeria is pre-occupied with chasing shadows and not the fundamental causes of conflicts in the country. The government at all levels of governance has not preoccupied themselves with the fundamental issues and objective conditions of the Nigerians polity, which were the root causes of these conflicts.

- 2.) The judicial and other panels of enquires on Civil disobedience and violence never had their recommendations implemented by Government.
- 3.) The police and other security outfits have not been adequately trained to manage crisis.
- 4.) The master minds, which instigate, mobilize, sponsor and even armed the rioters are allowed to go scot free. They are never prosecuted or tried in any law court, and if found guilty sentenced to a long term of prison sentence. Some of the people who sponsor violent conflicts are the elites and powerful members of the society.

#### **Employee Relations:**

Employees or employment relations are concerned with generally managing the employment relationship with particular reference to terms and conditions of employment, issues arising from employment, providing employees with a voice and communicating with employees. Employees are dealt with either directly or through collective agreements where trade unions are recognized.

Employee relations cover a wider spectrum of the employment relationship than industrial relations, which are essentially about what goes on between management and trade union representatives and officials.

According to Farnham (2000), employee relations deal with the interactions amongst the parties to the employment relationship. These consist of three groups: employers and employees, the parties who act on their behalf (trade unions and employer associations) and the third – party role played by the state agencies and the European union Institutions: He points out that within organizations, employee relations practices are the product of a number of factors, namely:

- The interest of the buyers and sellers of labour services (or human resources skills)
- The agreements and rules made by them and their agents
- The conflict – resolving processes that are used
- The external influences affecting the parties making employment decisions.

#### **The Parties to Employee Relations:-**

The parties to employee relations are

- (1) The government
- (2) The trade unions (Nigerian Labour Congress)
- (3) Employee representatives or shop stewards
- (4) The trade union congress (the TUC)
- (5) Staff associations
- (6) Management
- (7) Employer's organizations
- (8) Various institutions, agencies and officers
- (9) The HR function etc.

#### **Effects of Unresolved Conflicts at the Workplace**

Some of the effects of unresolved conflict in the workplace include the following;

- Employee frustration, employee stress, anxiety and loss of sleep
- High employee turnover, strained relationships
- Loss of productivity and increased customers complaints
- Increased absenteeism and incidents of sabotage
- Increased injuries and accidents
- Increased use of sick leave and increased workers compensation claims
- Incidence of workplace violence industrial strikes of employees

#### **Methods of Managing Conflicts**

Structure theorists opined that society is dynamic and that changes brought about by factors of modernity to the political, economic, religious and cultural institutions of a people would most likely provoke conflicts which require changing methods of managing them. The factors include western education, new legal system, industrialization, urbanization, technology, politics, economy and religion. This thinking aligns with modernity and group dynamic theorists like Fortes, Herbaria's, Heller etc. who note that modernity consists of a

Complete cultural dynamic and novel subjective experiences which alter the structure of the society. Since conflict is a part of life, it is also a part of growth and change. We can live a part of growth and change. We can live with it, which implies learning about it, making choices and seeking to transform it in a creative way, or we can live in it. Management therefore is a process of utilizing available resources to transform conflict into a functional level of which the parties concerned can relate at an acceptable level. This is where the role of the government becomes important in creating enabling institutional framework for managing our conflicts. Peace is a pre-requisite for a purposeful development and as such, it is a viable goal for any good government. Good governance refers to the transparent and accountable management of all the country's resources for its equitable and sustainable economic and social development. Below are various ways of managing conflict:

- 1.) **Negotiation:** is a process in which two or more parties attempt to reach a joint decision on matters of common concern in situations where they are in potential disagreement. It can also be a direct process of dialog and discussion taking place between two parties who are faced with a dispute. The goal of negotiation is to reach agreement through joint decision between parties. Negotiators according to Morris cited in Onu (2009), may use a variety of approaches. One is "Power negotiation" which involves a negotiators understanding and strategic use of various sources of power to achieve a negotiators bargaining goals. Secondly is interest-based negotiation. In this process, attempts are made to reach solutions that meet the interests of all parties.
- 2.) **Communication:** this is the process of sharing and exchange information between individual, groups and parties in a conflict situation. This works in the workplace conflict situation.
- 3.) **Collaboration:** the collaboration process is one in which parties work together on their own to resolve problems through constructive dialogue or other activities like joint projects, sharing of community schools and health centers, building of markets, bridges and culverts, as well as other utilities according to Aghedo and Osumah (2009).
- 4.) **Mediation:** this is the process in which an impartial third party helps disputants to end a dispute or plan a transaction, but does not have the power to impose a binding solution. According to Godsons (2006) cited in Onuoha (2009), the stages involved in the mediation include initiation, preparation, introduction, problem statement, problem clarification, generalization and evaluation of alternatives, selection of alternatives and agreements. Different kinds of relationships arise when a mediator interacts with parties in conflicts.
- 5.) **Conciliation:** this is a third party activity, which covers the intermediary effort aimed at persuading the parties to a conflict to work towards a peaceful solution.
- 6.) **Adjudication:** this involves the use of the courts and litigation processes. Adjudication determines the outcome of a dispute by making a decision for the parties that is final, binding and enforceable. This was the method used in Ugbo-Mahin conflict in Ilaje of Ondo State.



- 7.) **Arbitration:** this is also a third party intervention that the parties to a conflict who select to use arbitration, either though they choose a non-violent method of settling their conflict.
- 8.) **Crisis management:** this is an extreme situation of conflict, which has reached a turning point where critical decision has to be taken or else the conflict may escalate to a point of extreme violence. This lead to threat to human security, intense violence characterized by fighting, death, injury, large scale displacement of population. This is just like the Boko Haram issue in Borno, Yobe and Adamawa states of Nigeria. Once a crisis occurs, it is the responsibility of the government of a state to de-escalate the situation and bring a cessation to the violence. This may be done through various means including the use of coercive state apparatus, where necessary (Fred-Mensah, 2009) cited in Okungbowa and Epelle (2011).
- 9.) **Conflict resolution:** this is both a principle and process. In confliction resolution, parties are helped by negotiators and mediators to decide and give consent on how they should
  - (a) Shield swords against violence
  - (b) Put their strength under control
  - (c) Reduce tension
  - (d) Promote greater collaboration and cooperation.
 This is to say deep rooted sources of conflict are addressed and resolved, and behavior is no longer violent, nor are attitudes hostile any longer, while the structure of the conflict has been changed.
- 10.) **Conflict management** is basically the use of open and clear dialogue to assist opponents or parties not only to have agreements against hostile images, orations, but compliance to agreed resolution and strategies. It is a whole effort, process that span through conflict phases to prevent conflict in the first place or its escalation, or to restore confidence of greater safety to parties even when a given conflict case is considered under control. Functionally conflict management is more of the action driven dimension of the conflict resolution principles.
- 11.) **Conflict-transformation** is a continuation of conflict management but captures more specifically the physiological effect to create a change in the mindsets of the disputing parties on the history of conflict actor roles, damage effects of conflict and violence. According to Miall 2001 cited in Onu (2009) different types of conflict transformation are identified which includes;
  - a.) Context transformation: this refers to changes in the context of conflicts that may radically alter each party's perception of the conflict situation, as well as their motives.
  - b.) Structural transformation: this refers to changes in the basic structure of the conflict, which is to the set of actors, their issues, incompatible goals and relationship, or the society, economy or state within which the conflict is embedded
  - c.) Actor transformation: This concern the reformations of positions that parties take on key issues at the heart of the conflict as well as the ways in which, parties redefine or reframe these positions in order to reach compromise or resolutions.
  - d.) Personal changes of heart or mind within individual leaders or small groups: this is a kind of personal transformation that affects the attitude, memory, behavior and relationships.

- e.) Rules: this is changing the norms and rules governing decision-making at all levels in order to ensure that conflicts are dealt with constructively through institutional channels.
- 12.) Good governance: this can be described as the running of the affair of the government in positive and progressive manner beneficial to the governed and which delivers to the public goods. Its attributes includes transparency, due process, responsiveness on the part of government, rule of law, power sharing competence, separation and devolution of power, a free press and a free virile civil society. It is also the process of interacting and relating with others, meaning that parties to a conflict situation still talk.
- 13.) Grass-root community base activities: this includes village festivals like the new yam festival among the Igbos, initiation rites and puberty festival for young people, marriage ceremonies, the sharing of village community land when unity/solidarity is lost to violent conflict, as well as the case in the conflict between Ife and Modakeke of Osun state, Erinile and Offa of Kwara state, the Umuleri/Aguleri of Anambra state, Eleme and Okirika of Rivers state, the chamber/Jukan and Kuteb of Taraba state, all in Nigeria. For instance, the importance of such community virtue cannot be over-emphasized.
- 14.) Judicial settlement of legal method of dispute resolution (Litigation): this is usually carried out by the court duly established and assigned in this manner both at the state (local) level and international level. At the international level, it is usually referred to as "International Court of Justice (ICI)". It is also called the "The World Court". It sits at the Peace Palace, at The Hague.
- 15.) Conflict suppression: this is a conflict situation which portrays the unwillingness or lukewarm attitude of more powerful parties, or stronger interveners who has the ability to transform or manage a conflict situation, to take necessary measures leading to the management or resolution of the conflict. Instead, they use instruments of power or force to push away the issues under carpet or to impose a solution that is not sustainable and with the parties are not satisfied. This usually takes place in unequal relationships. A typical example is a situation where by the state or government uses its coercive apparatus to suppress opponents or conflicts which cannot be sustained because conflicts can still resurface at any time or with little provocation.

#### **Conclusion and recommendation:**

In this paper attempt has been made to explain causes of conflict, stages of conflict, with special interest in workplace as well as methods of managing conflicts. The intensity of conflict is determined by the attitude or mode of approaches adopted by the parties involved. In as much as conflict is inevitable in the life of an individual, groups, organizations, workplace, state or nation, it therefore becomes imperative to adopt combination of methods in resolving disputes in order not to endanger peace and security of the society. However, the success of any non-legal means will be determined by the desire or willingness of the parties to end their differences amicably as the decision or agreement reached is not binding on either parties. It is therefore recommended that:-

- (i) There is need to build the culture of peace among the citizenry as this reduces the culture of violence.
- (ii) The government or management staff of cooperation's should create the right area of open discussions with the aggrieved parties as early as notice of labour discontent have been served.

- (iii) The government or management staff of cooperation's should work with the agreement reached with the labour union.
- (iv) The government should come up with an acceptable sharing formula for Federal collected revenue as this has been annoying issue among the various group of the country.

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