

Full Length Research Paper

Management of Organizational Conflict in Nigeria Polytechnics: An Empirical Study of the Federal Polytechnic, Ede Osun State

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The study investigated the conflict management styles used in the Federal Polytechnic, Ede and the possible effects on the organizational performance of the institution since 1992. It focused on the causes, types, effects and strategies for managing conflicts with a view to suggesting ways of improving the performance and productivity of the school. The study employed descriptive research design and used questionnaire to collect data from 100 senior officer's cadre of the institution. The research revealed that the major cause of organizational conflicts in the institution was communication. It was identified that inter-group conflict was the main type of conflict in the institution. About 50% of the respondents believed that conflicts interfere with organization operations and wastes resources. About 74% believed that conflicts can be managed through collaboration and bargaining. The influences of gender, position held in the polytechnic, and experience on the opinion of staff on causes, effects, and conflict management strategies were established. To improve the relationship between management and other stakeholders, management should encourage the spirit of team work. Provision of basic facilities like office accommodation and furniture should be improved. The beginning and end of year briefings used in the institution should be sustained and made inspiring and motivational in nature. Management should adopt an open policy strategy so that different groups can move closer, collaborate and make some compromises where possible so that the objectives of setting up the polytechnic will be achieved.

Keywords: Conflict, Basic provisions, stakeholders, Open Policy, Compromise, Team Work.

INTRODUCTION

An organization is composed of people, facilities and systems put in place to achieve specific objectives. In most cases, the objective is to render service(s) in pursuit of money or in fulfilling social obligations. The people, the facilities and the systems interplay in order to achieve a given goal. The facilities are composed of buildings, infrastructure and support services. Conflict may be defined as an expressed struggle between two or more interdependent parties perceiving incompatible goals, scarce resources, and interference from others in achieving their goals that (Hocker & Wilmot, 2001).

Coser (1967) is of the opinion conflict is "a struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power, and resources in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralize, injure, or eliminate the rivals." To Deutsch (1973) conflict exists whenever incompatible activities occur. An action which is incompatible with another action prevents, obstructs, interferes with, injures, or in some way makes it less likely or less effective.

Conflict in academic settings is a daily occurrence because a consensus of opinion concerning rules governing the school seldom exists among the participants: administrators, teachers, students, and parents. These parties, particularly administrators and students, see one another as adversaries, not as those working toward a common goal, as is generally the case

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in other organizations. There is potential for conflict in practically every decision which the administrator must make. Coping efficiently and effectively with potential and bona fide conflicts is possibly one of the most important aspects of the administrator's position (Nebgen, 1978). Conflict presently continues to be a factor in academic life. Schools frequently appear to be centers of tension; on occasion, they are perhaps a manifestation of problems in the community. However, Schofield (1977) states that it is nonetheless essential for administrators to know why they, as school leaders, are so often central in community controversies. The rest of the paper is organized as follows: section two reviews literature on sources, types, causes and consequential effect of conflicts, section three deals with the methodology and data analysis while section four deals with discussion and recommendation.

Literature Review

Jones et al (2000) is of the opinion that conflicts are inevitable part of organizational life since the goals of different stakeholders such as managers and staff are often incompatible. Conflict is an unpleasant fact in any organization as long as people compete for jobs, resources, power, recognition and security. To Henry (2009) organizational conflict can be regarded as a dispute that occurs when interests, goals or values of different individuals or groups are incompatible with each other. This results into a situation whereby they frustrate each other in an attempt to achieve their objectives. Conflict arises in groups because of the scarcity of freedom, position, and resources. People who value independence tend to resist the need for interdependence and, to some extent, conformity within a group. People who seek power therefore struggle with others for position or status within the group.

Conflict is conceptually dependent on major components such as expressed struggle, interdependence, perceived incompatibility of goals, perceived scarce rewards, and interference (Domenici & Littlejohn, 2001). In light of those major components, conflict is defined as an expressed struggle between two or more interdependent parties perceiving incompatible goals, scarce resources, and interference from others in achieving their goals (Hocker & Wilmot, 2001). Hocker and Wilmot (1985) say conflict can have highly desirable, productive functions in a relationship. Conflict, if properly managed, conflict can increase individuals' innovativeness and productivity (Uline, Tschannen-moran, & Perez, 2003). Conflict can offer "interpersonal relationship satisfaction, creative problem solving, the growth of the global workforce, and domestic workplace diversity" (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001) and can lead to "improved efficiency, creativity, and profitability" (Axelrod

& Johnson, 2005). If however, mishandled conflict can directly cause "organizational inefficiency, reduced productivity, stymied innovation, and compromised profits" (Axelrod & Johnson, 2005).

Conflict is a part of organizational life and may occur between individuals, between the individual and the group, and between groups (Weihrich 1992). Rusell & Jerome (1976) believe that although conflict is generally perceived as dysfunctional, it can also be beneficial because it may cause an issue to be presented in different perspectives. Conflict has both positive and negative effects. It can be positive when it encourages creativity, new looks at old conditions, the clarification of points of view, and the development of human capabilities to handle interpersonal differences. Conflict can be negative when it creates resistance to change, establishes turmoil in organization or interpersonal relations fosters distrust, builds a feeling of defeat, or widens the chasm of misunderstanding.

Types of Organizational Conflict

Ikeda et al (2005) in Hotepo (2010), observed that organizational conflict involves interpersonal conflicts with colleagues or supervisors, or intergroup conflicts within different sections of an organization. To Imazai and Ohbuchi (2002), there are two essential types of conflict in organizations: vertical and horizontal. Vertical conflict occurs in groups of different hierarchical levels, such as supervisors and salesmen, whereas horizontal conflict occurs between individuals of the same level, such as managers in the same organization. In the vertical conflict, differences in status and power between groups are in general larger than in the horizontal conflict - Robbins (1983) because these aspects tend to equalize in equivalent hierarchical levels.

Causes of Organizational Conflicts

In any organization, there are many causes of conflicts; however, conflicts within an individual usually arise when a person is uncertain about what task is expected to do, if not clearly defined by the supervisor or the person in charge Henry (2009). If the tasks of individuals working as a group are not clearly defined by the management they will lead to more conflicts. Conflicts between individuals may result from role-related pressures. Conflicts would arise between individuals and groups if the goals were not specified for individuals within a group- Duke (1999). From the literature, there are innumerable origins of organizational dispute and each produces its own variety of effects. In general, there are six major sources: (i) the interpersonal disagreements that arise when one person is experiencing individual

stress; (ii) the problems resulting from role conflict, a condition that occurs when there is a clash over one's role in the organization; (iii) the power struggles that pit persons and groups against one another to achieve their own selfish objectives; (iv) the misunderstandings and disagreements from differentiation, i.e., the clashes that arise because people approach common problems from very different orientations; (v) the interdependence requirements for collaboration which, if not extensive and balanced between the parties, cause communication and interaction breakdowns which, in turn, if critical, lead to more intensive conflicts; and (vi) the external pressures from forces outside the enterprise that breed internal pressures as the system seeks to adapt but not to disrupt its internal order.

According to the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (2007), some of the causes of conflict can be listed as: i) General behaviour and conduct issues are rated as the most common causes of disputes at work, followed by conflicts over performance, sickness absence and attendance, and relationships between colleagues, ii) Respondents also identify theft and fraud, bullying and harassment, as well as sex discrimination and equal pay issues as among the most frequent causes of conflict, iii) Performance issues are rated more highly as a frequent cause of conflict among private services and not-for-profit organisations, compared with the other two main sectors and, in particular, public services employers.

Effects of Organizational Conflicts

To Muhammad, et al (2009)), conflict at an initial stage could easily be controlled but which could lead to complications if allowed to aggravate. Hence a strategy of conflict resolution in any organizations becomes mandatory (Stephen and Julia, 1995). It has been experienced that task conflict creates dissatisfaction among the employees. In the wake of such a situation, routine tasks are adversely affected than non routine tasks (Jehn, 1995). It is imperative that conflict emergence be addressed and vigilance is maintained in such an environment to stall its adverse effect at an early stage. Usually dominant and avoiding approach creates conflict among the employees (Friedman and Tidd and Curral and Tsai, 2000). These conflicts become noticeable during the meetings and general discussions on organizational objectives and, goals (DiPaola et al., 2001 in Muhammad, et al (2009)). The phenomenon also takes place whereby useful and important decisions are at offing stage. Task conflict is interrelated with beneficial and other events in the reorganizations (Simons et al., 2000). Task conflict becomes pronounced while decision taking place are complex in nature or highly skilled in its manifestation. It leads to negativism in the development and maintainability of the team hence performance is

being marred in such like situations (De Dreu and Weingart, 2003). Parker (1974) argued that if conflicts arise and are not managed properly, it will lead to delays of work, disinterest and lack of action and in extreme cases it might lead to complete breakdown of the group. Unmanaged conflict may result in withdrawal of individuals and unwillingness on their part to participate in other groups or assist with various group action programs in the organization.

Conflict Management Styles

Butler Jr. (1993) has discussed styles used by negotiators and found that those negotiators who use integrating (collaborating), obliging (accommodating) or avoiding style were more effective than those who use dominating (competing) style. Individuals who use integrative (collaborative style) conflict handling style experience lower level of work conflict and stress at job, but people using avoiding or dominating (competing) style were facing more conflicts and work stress (Friedman et al. 2000). To Hotepo et al (2010), conflict can be managed in different ways, some focusing on interpersonal relationships and others on structural changes. Robinson et al (1974) advocates that managing conflict toward constructive action is the best approach in resolving conflict in organization. When conflict arises, we need to be able to manage them properly, so that it becomes a positive force, rather than a negative force, which would threaten the individual or group.

To Robert and Jane (1969), an interpersonal approach by way of avoidance of the situation that causes the conflict is good. Another way of coping with conflict is through smoothing, emphasizing the areas of agreement and common goals and de-emphasizing disagreements. A third way according to them is forcing, pushing one's own view on others; this, of course, will cause overt or covert resistance. A traditional way of coping with conflict is to compromise, agreeing in part with the other person's view or demand. The biggest problem in developing the institutions of conflict control in organization is to develop an action of plan to identify conflicts at its initial stage. Knippen and Green (1999) cited in Henry (2009) argued that the best way to handle conflicts objectively is to follow six process that involves describing the conflict situation to the other person, asking the other person how he sees the conflict situation, responding the way the other person sees the situation, jointly deciding how to resolve the conflict, making commitment to resolve the conflicts, and promising to be committed in future to continue resolving conflicts, which might arise. Another way of coping with organizational conflicts is to make structural changes. This means modifying and integrating the objectives of groups with different viewpoints.

Derr (1975) opined that Contingency Theory is one of the conceptual tools useful for managing organizational conflicts. He stated that there are three major conflict management approaches from which interveners can draw to formulate an approach appropriate for resolving a dispute; Collaboration, Bargaining and Power play. The appropriate use of these methods depends on the individual and organizational state. Collaboration involves people surfacing their differences (get them out in the open) and then work on the problems until they have attained mutually satisfactory solutions. This approach assumes that people will be motivated to expend the time and energy for such problem-solving activity. Bargaining on the other hand assumes that neither party will emerge satisfied from the confrontation but that both, through negotiation, can get something they do not have at the start, or more of something they need, usually by giving up something of lesser importance. One party generally wins more than the other; by the skillful use of tactical trades, he can get the maximum possible from the other side. Third approach is Power Play, which differs from the other two approaches because its emphasis is on self-interest. Whereas, in collaboration and bargaining the two sides come together to try to resolve their problems, when power is the dominant mode, the actions are unilateral or in coalitions acting unilaterally. Table below illustrates the various technologies applicable to each major cause of conflict given the three different approaches.

Factors Affecting Conflict Management Styles

Gender has been known as an important variable that influences conflict management styles. However, findings about the effect of gender on conflict management have been mixed (Putnam & Poole, 1987). While some studies found no differences between the two genders when approaching conflict, others studies demonstrated that males and females managed conflict significantly differently (Sorenson et al., 1995). Lindeman et al.'s (1997) study of age and gender differences in adolescents' reaction towards conflict found that boys and girls behaved differently in conflict situations. Results of a comparative study of Indonesian and American children by French et al. (2005) indicated that both genders used different styles in conflict. Offerman and Beil (1992) found that females and males in the United States differed in their achievement orientation, and that females were less interested in competition. A number of studies found that the effects of gender on conflict style were insignificant or, at best, unclear. For example, on their study on the effect of culture and gender on children's conflict styles in Indonesia and Germany, Haar and Krahé, (1999) found that even though culture had a

significant effect on participants' conflict management styles, there was no gender effect.

In addition to gender influence, socio-cultural norms and values are also significant variables influencing individuals' conflict styles (Haar & Krahé, 1999). Numerous studies have indicated that there are differences in conflict styles in individualistic and collectivistic cultures. However, there are mixed empirical findings regarding which styles are preferred by collectivists and individualists (Kim & Leung, 2000). A number of studies propose that Asians (collectivists) tend to use the accommodating and avoiding styles (Ma, 2007), while competition is perceived more desirably by Americans (individualists) (French et al., 2005).

Zhang et al (2005) examined perceptions of conflict management styles used by the young adults in Chinese intergenerational dyads. They found that the younger participants considered the accommodating and problem-solving styles as equally appropriate, and that the older participants preferred the accommodating style to the problem-solving style. They also found that participants, regardless of their age, evaluated the competing and avoiding style negatively. Researchers have discussed conflict handling styles in different perspective and found that there are various determinants of selection of conflict handling styles like differences on the basis of gender, position in job, experience, age (Brahnam et al., 2005; Polkinghorn & Byrne, 2001).

Methodology & Data

This study employed a descriptive survey design whose purpose according to Ezeani (1998), is to collect detailed and factual information that describes an existing phenomenon. The target population of the study was the Federal Polytechnic, Ede, Nigeria. A stratified sampling technique was used to select 100 personnel who provided responses to a structured questionnaire design to solicit their view about the impact of conflict management on corporate productivity in Nigeria polytechnics. Deans and Heads of Departments/Units served as sampling units. The instrument used in this research was a structured and non-disguised questionnaire with close-ended questions. Respondents were asked to pick the best alternative answer to each question that corresponds to their opinion. 75 questionnaires were duly filled and returned meaning a response rate of 75% was achieved. The analysis of data was done using frequency counts and percentages.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study sought to find answers to the following questions:

Appendix

Table 1. Bio-data of Respondents

Sex of Respondent	No	%
Male	67	89.3
Female	8	10.7
Total	75	100.0
Highest Qualification of Respondent		
HND/NCE	6	8.0
Master's Degree	55	73.3
Postgraduate Diploma	2	2.7
Ph.D	12	16.0
Total	75	100.0
Position Held in the Polytechnic		
Dean of School	8	10.7
Head of Department	19	25.3
Head of Unit	12	16.0
Others	36	48.0
Total	75	100.0
Work Experience in Years		
11 to 15 years	10	13.3
16 to 20 years	25	33.3
Above 20 years	40	53.3
Total	75	100.0

Source: Author's Field Survey 2011

- i. What are the types of conflicts experienced in the institution?
- ii. What are the reasons for conflicts in the institution?
- iii. What are the types of management styles available for conflict resolution in the institution?
- iv. What effect if any has sex, position held, and experience on conflict resolution style in the institution?
- v. What are the possible effects of conflict on the realization of organizational objectives?

DATA ANALYSIS

The analysis was carried out in accordance with the research questions. In each case, the responses to questions were converted into percentages and reported in Table 1 through Table 5. Table 1 contains the analysis

of personal details of respondents. 89.3% are male respondent while only 10.7% of female respondents participated. 73.3% of the respondents have Master degree with only 16.0% PhD holders. About 52% of the respondents are currently holding one position of authority or the other while the composition of others (48%) are majorly chief lecturers or higher executive officers who have held one position or the other in the recent past. From the same table, about 86.6% of the respondents have spent more than sixteen years in the services of the polytechnic. The views captured by this study are therefore judged as reliable.

Table 2, contains the views of the people on types, causes, effects and strategies for managing conflicts. From this table, 45.3%, and 18.7% are of the opinion that inter-group and procedural conflicts respectively are common on the campus, only 5.3% and 4% are viewed as personal or task related conflicts. From this table, 30.7%, 18.7% are of the opinion that the causes of conflicts are communication problem and differences in expectations respectively. Salary comparison and lack of resources are also potential reasons with only 16% in

Table 2. Types, Causes, Effects and Conflicts Management Strategies

Types of Conflicts	No	%
Inter-personal	11	14.7
Intra-group	9	12.0
Inter-group	34	45.3
Personal	4	5.3
Task Related	3	4.0
Procedural	14	18.7
Total	75	100.0
Causes of Organizational Conflict	No	%
Lack of Resources	12	16.0
Different Expectations	14	18.7
Competition	5	6.7
Lack of Cooperation	7	9.3
Salary Comparison	12	16.0
Interdependence	2	2.7
Communication	23	30.7
Total	75	100.0
Effects of Conflicts	No	%
Builds cooperation	4	5.3
Increase Organizational Innovativeness & Productivity	9	12.0
Improving Quality Decisions	5	6.7
Improves Conflict Management Skills	13	17.3
Interferes With Organization Operations	20	26.7
Lack of Cooperation	2	2.7
Wasting of Resources	5	6.7
No/Low Productivity	17	22.7
Total	75	100.0
Strategies for Managing Conflicts	No	%
Avoidance	6	8.0
Collaboration	29	38.7
Bargaining	26	34.7
Confrontation	2	2.7
Compromise	12	16.0
Total	75	100.0

Source: Author's Field Survey 2011

each case. It is also observed that 26.7% and 22.7% of respondents believe that conflicts interferes with organization operations of the campus, 22.7% believe that conflicts can reduce productivity, 17.3% maintain that conflicts can actually improves conflict management skills. Only 6.7% viewed it as a source of resources wastage and 2% viewed conflict as reason for lack of cooperation. It could be observed from the table that 5, 38.7% believed that conflicts can be managed through collaboration, 34.7% believed it can be managed through

bargaining while 16% opined that conflicts can be managed through compromise. Only 2.7% viewed conflict management should come through confrontation.

Comparison of responses

Effect of Gender on Opinion of Respondents

Table 3 contains reaction of gender to issues raised in this study. 100% female respondents, 38.81% male respondents believe that inter-group conflicts are

Table 3. Effect of Sex on Views of Respondents

Types of Conflicts	Sex of Respondent	
	Male	Female
Inter-personal	16.42	0.0
Intra-group	13.43	0.0
Inter-group	38.81	100.00
Personal	5.97	0.0
Task Related	4.48	0.0
Procedural	20.90	0.0
Total	100	100
Causes of Organizational Conflict	Male (%)	Female (%)
Lack of Resources	17.9	0.0
Different Expectations	20.9	0.0
Competition	7.5	0.0
Lack of Cooperation	10.4	0.0
Salary Comparison	11.9	50.0
Interdependence	3.0	0.0
Communication	28.4	50.0
Total	100	100
Effects of Conflicts	Male	Female
Builds cooperation	5.97	0.0
Increase Organizational Innovativeness & Productivity	13.43	0.0
Improving Quality Decisions	7.46	0.0
Improves Conflict Management Skills	13.43	50
Interferes With Organization Operations	29.85	0.0
Lack of Cooperation	2.99	0.0
Wasting of Resources	7.46	0.0
No/Low Productivity	19.40	50
Total	100	100
Strategies for Managing Conflicts	Male	Female
Avoidance	8.96	0.0
Collaboration	43.28	0.0
Bargaining	32.84	50.00
Confrontation	2.99	0.0
Compromise	11.94	50.00
Total	100	100

Source: Author's Field Survey 2011

common. 20.9% males see procedural strategies as another factor. 28.4% males and 50% female respondents agree that conflict is caused by communication issues, while 50% female respondents see salary comparison as a factor only 11.9% male respondents agreed with this as a factor. 20.9% males also see different expectations as a factor for conflict. On

effect of conflicts on institutional activities, 50% females and 13.43% male respondents believe that conflicts improve conflict management skills. 50% females and 19.4% males believe that conflicts lower productivity. Majority (29.85%) of the male respondents believe conflicts interfere with organization operations. On strategies for managing conflicts, 50% females hold the

Table 4. Effect of Position Held on Opinion of respondents

Types of Conflicts	Position Held in the Polytechnic (%)			
	Deans	HODs	HOU's	Others
Inter-personal	12.50	26.32	25.00	5.56
Intra-group	12.50	5.26	8.33	16.67
Inter-group	37.50	31.58	41.67	55.56
Personal	12.50	5.26	0.0	5.56
Task Related	12.50	5.26	0.0	2.78
Procedural	12.50	26.32	25.00	13.89
Total	100	100	100	100
Causes of Organizational Conflict	Deans	HODs	HOU's	Others
Lack of Resources	50.0	10.5	16.7	11.1
Different Expectations	25.0	10.5	25.0	19.4
Competition	0.0	5.3	8.3	8.3
Lack of Cooperation	0.0	5.3	8.3	13.9
Salary Comparison	25.0	26.3	16.7	8.3
Interdependence	0.0	10.5	0.0	0.0
Communication	0.0	31.6	25.0	38.9
Total	100	100	100	100
Effects of Conflicts				
Builds cooperation	0.0	5.26	0.0	8.33
Increase Organizational Innovativeness & Productivity	0.0	0.0	25.00	16.67
Improving Quality Decisions	0.0	5.26	0.0	11.11
Improves Conflict Management Skills	87.50	0.0	0.0	16.67
Interferes With Organization Operations	12.50	52.63	41.67	11.11
Lack of Cooperation	0.0	5.26	0.0	2.78
Wasting of Resources	0.0	5.26	8.33	8.33
No/Low Productivity	0.0	26.32	25.00	25.00
Total	100	100	100	100
Strategies for Managing Conflicts				
Avoidance	0.0	0.0	33.33	5.56
Collaboration	37.50	52.63	41.67	30.56
Bargaining	25.00	26.32	8.33	50.00
Confrontation	0.0	0.0	0.0	5.56
Compromise	37.50	21.05	16.67	8.33
Total	100	100	100	100

Source: Author's Field Survey 2011

believe that bargaining or compromise are best strategies, while the males believe that bargaining (32.84%) and collaboration (43.28%) are best alternative strategies to manage conflict. From this analysis, sex of respondents affects their opinion on: causes, effects and conflict management strategies.

Effect of Position Held in the Polytechnic on Opinion of Respondents

Table 4 contains reaction of persons holding one position of authority or the other to issues that are raised in this study. On types of conflicts, majority of respondents:

Table 5. Effect of Work Experience on Opinion of Respondents

	Work Experience in Years (%)		
	11 to 15 years	16 to 20 years	Above 20 years
Types of Conflicts			
Inter-personal	10	24	10
Intra-group	10	8	15
Inter-group	60	48	40
Personal	0.0	8	5
Task Related	0.0	4	5
Procedural	20	8	25
Total	100	100	100
Causes of Organizational Conflict			
Lack of Resources	0.0	8	25
Different Expectations	20	32	10
Competition	10	8	5
Lack of Cooperation	10	8	10
Salary Comparison	0.0	24	15
Interdependence	0.0	8	0.0
Communication	60	12	35
Total	100	100	100
Effects of Conflicts			
Builds cooperation	0.0	8	5
Increase Organizational Innovativeness & Productivity	10	0.0	20
Improving Quality Decisions	0.0	20	0.0
Improves Conflict Management Skills	0.0	4	30
Interferes With Organization Operations	10	44	20
Lack of Cooperation	0.0	8	0.0
Wasting of Resources	10	8	5
No/Low Productivity	70	8	20
Total	100	100	100
Strategies for Managing Conflicts			
Avoidance	40	0.0	5
Collaboration	0.0	60	35
Bargaining	60	40	25
Confrontation	0.0	0.0	5
Compromise	0.0	0.0	30
Total	100	100	100

Source: Author's Field Survey 2011

37.5% Deans, 31.58% HODs, 41.67% HOU, and 55.56% others believe that incidence of conflicts are as a result of inter-group conflicts. Procedural conflict is believed by respondents another type. On causes of

organizational conflict, 50% Deans, 10.5% HODs, 16.7% HOU and 11.1% of other category of staff believe lack of resources is a major factor. 31.6% HODs, 25% HOU and 38.9% others believe the major factor is

communication. 87.5%, Deans believe that conflict improves conflict management skills, 52.63%, HODs and 41.67% HOU's believe that conflict interferes with organization operations. We also observe that while 37.5% Deans believe best strategy is collaboration or compromise, 52.63% HODs and 41.67% HOU's believe that the best strategy is collaboration. However, 50% of the other categories of staff believe that the best strategy is bargaining. From this analysis, opinion of staff on: causes, effects, and conflict management strategies are influenced by position held in the polytechnic.

Effect of Experience on Opinion of Respondents

Table 5 contains views of respondents to issues raised in this study according to their experience on the job. 60% experienced staff (11 to 15 years), 48% more experienced staff (16 to 20 years), and 40% most experienced staff (above 20 years) believes that inter-group conflicts are common. From this table, 60% experienced staff view conflict as a result of inappropriate use of communication, 32% more experienced staff believe conflict happen because of different expectations or by salary comparison (24%), the most experienced staff opined that conflicts are as a result of communication problem (35%), or lack of resources (25%). On the effect of conflict on organizations, 70% experienced staff, 8% more experienced staff and 20% most experienced staff believe conflicts lowers productivity. 44% more experienced staff believe conflicts interfere with organization operations, 30% most experienced staff believe conflicts improve conflict management skills. It is observed that 60%, 40% and 25% of the experienced, the more experienced and the most experienced respondents believe that the best strategy is bargaining. 60% of the more experience and 35% of the most experienced respondents believe that the best strategy is collaboration. From this analysis, the influence of experience of respondents is noticeable on views on causes, effect and management strategies.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

From the inception of the polytechnic, only very few of the female folds have been involved in positions of authority or in unionism. The low responses of 10.7% may not actually be out of place. Majority believe that communication issues and differences in expectations are reasons for conflict. Communication is vital in an organization. People do not seek for information or are not bordered about happenings on campus. Even in statutory meetings most people do not make contributions when decisions are being taken. How do we get clarifications to issues that boarder us? Salary differentials are not as it were management issues. About

45%, of the opinions believed that inter-group conflicts are common in the campus. This happens between the three unions on campus which to the best of my knowledge was due to benefits enjoyed by one union and not extended to others. This is not frequent and when it happens they are controlled through dialogue and negotiations. On the possible effect of conflicts, about 59% are of the opinion that conflicts can actually have a negative effect on organizational operations. About 41% have the opinion that conflict has positive effect on organizational operations. This seems to be a balanced posture. This position is collaborated by the strategies for managing conflicts suggested by the respondents. More than 70% of views agreed that the best strategies are collaboration and bargaining. Going by the relative peace enjoyed by the Federal Polytechnic, Ede over her almost 20 years in existence, one can conclude that conflicts are resolved through these two strategies. From the comparative analysis, gender difference in opinion was observed on causes, effects and conflict management strategies. This is in line with the findings of Sorenson et al 1995, Lindeman et al (1997) and French et al (2005). Also the influence position held in the polytechnic affects the opinion of staff on causes, effects, and conflict management strategies. The influence of experience of respondents opinion was also confirmed on causes, effects, and management strategies. This is in line with the observation of Brahnam et al (2005) and Polkinghorn & Byrne (2001).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From this study, it is obvious that conflict in academic settings is not an exemption. There is potential for conflict in practically every decision which the management must make. Since conflict is seemingly unavoidable, particularly in a scholarly setting, it is obviously necessary for administrators to be able to recognize conflict, as having both positive and negative effect on management. Conflicts are part of human nature and it is extremely important to study it not only for theoretical purposes but also for organizational practice (Ikeda et al 2005). The results from the study indicate that the major cause of organizational conflicts in the Federal Polytechnic, Ede is communication. This leads to rumors among the people and if not properly handled can destabilize the system. The issues of lack of resources are potential factors. Basic provisions like office accommodation, furniture, and communication facilities like campus intercom may not be ignored. It is pertinent on the polytechnic management to ensure that the available limited resources are utilized optimally for the benefit of the organization and other stakeholders. Though conflict is often viewed as negative, it is capable of increasing organizational innovativeness and productivity, thereby improving organizational performance. To Henry (2009), conflicts

build the spirit of teamwork and cooperation among the employees of an organization. From this study, we found that inter-group conflict was identified as the main type of conflict in the institution. The spirit of team work need be instituted. Meetings like the beginning and end of year briefings used in the institution should be sustained and made inspiring and motivational in nature. Areas of differences can easily be trashed out from such gatherings. About 50% of the respondents believed that conflicts interfere with organization operations and wastes resources. This means that the implications are well known by the people. Although differences of opinion exist on this, a properly managed polytechnic will lead to the attainment and achievement of organizational goals and objectives. That about 74% believed that conflicts can be managed through collaboration and bargaining is not strange. The relationship between management and staff on one hand and management and students on the other hand have been cordial and healthy. The differences in opinion on causes and management of conflicts can be pooled together and a common ground arrived at for a lasting approach. In the height of the findings of this study, the following are recommended: i) Management should develop diverse but appropriate strategies to resolve and manage conflicts as they arise before escalating to unmanageable level; ii) Efforts should be made by the management to occasionally stimulate conflict (Adomi and Anie (2005)), by encouraging divergent views and rewarding staff and departments/units for outstanding performance. This can come up during the end of year briefings; iii) Proper communication procedures should be put in place to pass information across to staff and students from time to time. All necessary parts of the institution should be copied when information are conveyed through black and white; iv) Efforts should be made by the management to organize seminars/workshops on organizational conflict management (Adomi and Anie (2005)), from time to time for the employees. This will enable employees learn about conflict and how it can be effectively managed for individual and organization effectiveness; v) Group interaction and group activities should be used some of the times to ensure a degree of functionality compatible to conflicts. Management should adopt an open policy strategy so that different groups can move closer, collaborate and make some compromises where possible so that the objectives of setting up the polytechnic will be achieved.

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