EFFECTIVENESS OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION STRATEGIES ADOPTED BY PRINCIPALS IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN AKWA IBOM STATE

BY

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ABSTRACT

The study appraised the effectiveness of conflict resolution strategies employed by public secondary principals in Akwa Ibom State. The ex-post facto research design was used for the study. One hundred and fourteen principals and 625 teachers selected using a multi-cluster sampling technique from a population of 227 principals and 6520 teachers were used for the study. Two research-made instruments, "Conflict Resolution Strategies Questionnaire (CRSQ)" and "Effectiveness of Conflict Resolution Strategies (ECRSQ)" with split-half reliabilities of 0.79 and 091 were used or data collection. One research question was formulated to guide the study. Findings reveal that teachers perceive mediation, negotiation, compromise and collaboration are effective conflict resolution strategies while accommodating and competing are deemed fairly effective. One of the conclusion was that teachers perception mediation, negotiation, accommodating, competing, compromise and collaboration as effective conflict resolution strategies through a varying degrees and one of the recommendation was that education providers, stakeholders and principals will know that it is better to employ a mix of conflict resolution strategies instead of a single strategy in resolving conflicts in secondary schools.

KEY WORDS: *Effectiveness, mediation, negotiation, compromise, collaboration, Public Secondary Schools, Akwa Ibom State.*

INTRODUCTION

The function of secondary education among others is to prepare the students for useful living within the society and for higher education. Secondary schools are headed and administered by principals whose duty is to discharge various administrative functions aimed at ensuring achievement of educational goals. These functions include administration of curriculum and instruction, student personnel, staff personnel, physical facilities, financial and business as well as school-community relationships (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 110ov). These functions can only be achieved if all individuals found in secondary schools (principal, vice principals, teachers, support staff, students and at times members of the community) work cooperatively together. This cooperation ensures stability of the school system. The principal as the administrative head and leader works with people and through people so as to discharge these functions and attain educational goals (Onyene, 110ox).

Atanda and Lameed (110oL) assert that in the course of discharging their administrative functions, secondary school principals may encounter differences in customs, beliefs, religious affiliation and ethnicity. They also encounter social conflicts in the form of gender differences, sexual orientation, and class stereotypes, physical and mental abilities (Onyene, 110oc). It is the role of the principal as the educational leader to ensure that the goals of secondary education are actualised. Often times, secondary school principals are faced with the up-hill task of getting the

school staff and students under them to do what is expected of them in order to get the expected result. Experience has shown that no formula, no rule, no theory ever work perfectly with every group of students, especially adolescent secondary school students with their divergent storms and stress tendencies, coupled with the compelling peer group influences. Even with the cogent educational goals, specified rules and regulations, school principals find it difficult to effectively administer their schools free from conflict.

The school administrator may also encounter personality conflicts, which have to do with personality clashes and pressure arising from incompatible personalities. There are conflicts that arise from hierarchy of positions. Conflict may also arise because people interpret reality differently (Hoban, 1100D). People perceive differently, the severity, causes and consequences of problems. Conflicts can also occur because people ignore other's feelings and emotions. Some people let their feelings and emotions become a major influence over how they deal with problems. According to Hoban (1100D), how the principals define and use power and the way conflict is resolved in a school is an important influence on the number and types of conflicts that occur.

According to Lewicki (1MMM), conflict should be used as a tool for promoting organisational health and development through the way it is effectively resolved by stimulating it when necessary, encouraging people to express their differences, advocating collaboration and negotiation, and by helping others resolve conflicts through mediation. Balay (1100D) reported that administrators are more likely to use avoiding and compromising strategies than teachers. Private primary school heads tend to use compromising, avoiding and competing strategies than the public primary school heads. Crawford and Bodine (1100I) reported that principals of schools who employ conflict management strategies reported a drop in referrals and suspension case in their schools. According to Bassey (1100II), the most effective conflict resolution strategy in technical schools in confronting, followed by compromising, smoothing, forcing and withdrawal respectively. Based on the above background, this study was designed to examine the effectiveness of principals' conflict resolution strategies in Secondary Schools in Akwa Ibom State.

Statement of the Problem

Secondary schools are consciously coordinated social organizations composed of people who function together to achieve educational goals. In the course of interactions between members of the school, differences inherent in humans are exposed. These differences manifest as strives, frictions, discords, controversies and disagreements. In Akwa Ibom State Secondary Schools, conflict stems from dissonance between role expectations and role perceptions. Often, school conflicts prevent secondary school principals from getting the best from staff, students and at times, community members. Conflict may disrupt achievement of educational goals and impede organizational effectiveness in the school. When there are conflicts, the school cannot attract needed resources with which to function. Costly disruptions often ensue when negativity affect the teaching-learning process and the attainment of educational goals.

The element of the problem is the effectiveness of the conflict resolution strategies employed by secondary schools principals in Akwa Ibom State. The pertinent questions are: What strategies do school principals use in resolving these conflicts? How effective are these strategies in resolving conflict in secondary schools.

Purpose of the Study

This study is to examine the extent of effectiveness of some conflict resolution strategies with respect to conflict resolution in secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State.

Research Question

How effective is mediation, negotiation, accommodating, competing, compromise and collaboration as conflict resolution strategies in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State?

Literature Review

The Social System Theory by Getzel and Guba (1957)

This theory was proposed by Getzel and Guba in IMXC, and developed through a hypothetico-deductive analysis, which suggested that the structure of an organization may be analyzed from the point of view of the sub-organizations or roles played by participants in the functioning of the total organization (Peretomode, IIOOI). The theory asserts that a social system is one in which the components are people and each individual's behavior with the system is shaped by his psychological uniqueness and sociological attributes. In other words, behavior is a function of two dimensions, namely; sociological, or nomothetic dimension and psychological (personal), or idiographic dimension.

The nomothetic dimension renders behavior law-like, orderly, and predictable and ensures that the behavior conforms to societal norms. It consists of three interrelated conceptual elements — institution, role and expectations. Institutions are sub-systems of a society with roles, which are associated with a particular set of expectations. The role is a position within an institution associated with a set of rights and obligations varying in scope and ranging from functionally diffuse to functionally specific. Expectations are preconceptions people have about how a role incumbent will or should behave.

The ideology dimension on the other hand renders behavior unpredictable, divergent, particularistic and consists of the individual, personality and need-dispositions. The roles are occupied by individuals with peculiar personalities and need-dispositions. The need-dispositions are the tendencies to fulfill some requirements to orient and act in certain ways and to expect certain consequences from the actions (see Figure I).
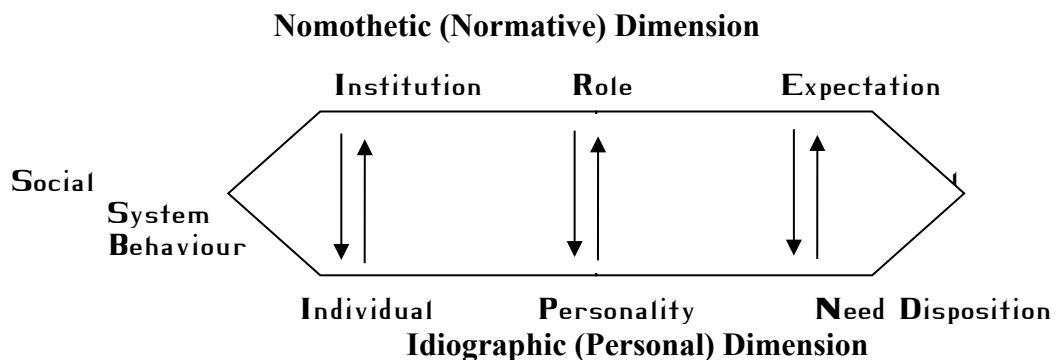
Nomothetic (Normative) Dimension

Figure I: Normative and Personal dimension of social behaviour
Source: Peretomode (IIOOI).

Conflict arises when there is no congruence between the interrelated elements of the two dimensions, and ensuring congruence between these interrelated elements amount to conflict management. Through the theory, highlighted causes of conflicts, it is silent on the effects of conflict on the organization as well as means of ensuring congruence between the interrelated conceptual elements of the two dimensions that they result in conflict. The theory ignored the influence of the informal organization on behaviour. The modified version of the theory included mores (Figure II).
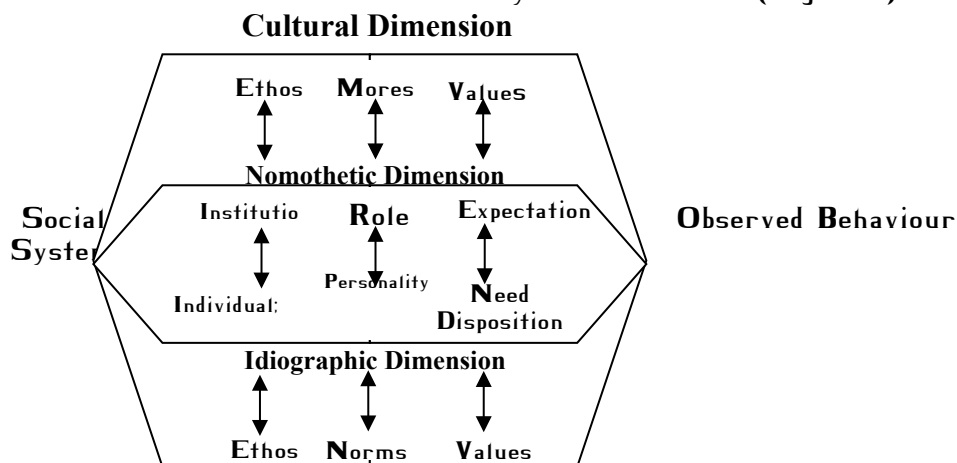

Figure II: Expanded social system Model
Source: Peretomode (IIOOI).

Mores are the customs and behaviour considered typical of a particular social group or human components and shows that the external communities of the social system have impact on observed behaviour at both the institutional and individual levels. This theory is relevant for this study in view of the fact that secondary schools are social systems made up of people whose behaviours are functions of the two dimensions highlighted in the theory. The non-conformity of their behaviours to the interrelated conceptual elements of the dimensions may lead to conflicts, which the school principal must deal with using appropriate strategies for the school to achieve its goals.
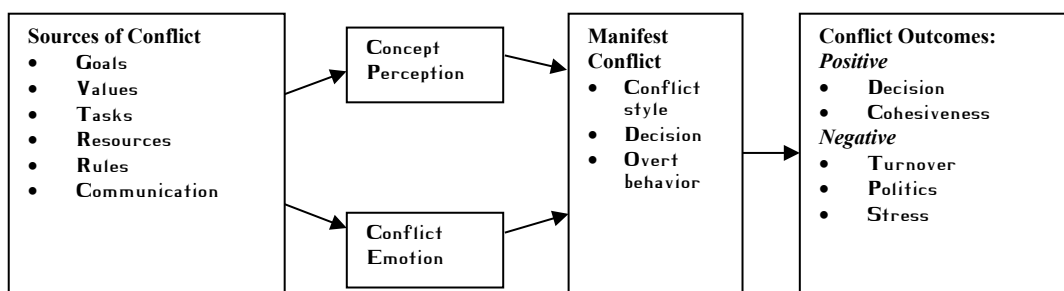
Conceptual Framework

Conflict

Conflict is a process in which one party perceives that its interests are being opposed or negatively affected by another party (McShane and Glinow, IIOOIII; Kinicki, IIOOV). It is part of organizational life and it occurs within the individual, between individuals,

between the individual and the groups, and between groups (Weihrich and Koontz, 110ox). Conflict within the individual often manifests as aggression, which are transferred to innocent people resulting in strives, misunderstanding and squabbles capable of causing costly disruptions in the work place. Conflict is inevitable in any organization, a natural part of life and according to Pandharker (1MMx), it is a natural part of school life. A typical conflict process is shown in Figure v.

Figure III: Evolutionary stages of conflict
Source: McShane and Glinow (1100III).

When the conflict outcome is positive, the conflict is said to be functional. This is, it supports the goals of the groups in the school and improves performance; there is group cohesiveness and consensus decision-making. On the other hand, if the conflict outcome is negative, it is dysfunctional, hinders group performance and leads to turnover, politics and stress.

Sources of Conflict	Concept Perception	Manifest Conflict	Conflict Outcomes:
• Goals • Values • Tasks • Resources • Rules • Communication	Conflict Emotion	• Conflict style • Decision • Overt behavior	*Positive* • Decision • Cohesiveness *Negative* • Turnover • Politics • Stress

While conflict is universal, the ways it is expressed and handled are not. Individual cultural framework has its own conception of conflict and techniques and processes for resolving it. Conflict resolution theory has attempted to construct universal models and techniques that claim to be applicable across all social and cultural domain of conflict. The western perspective of conflict resolution has generally failed to consider non-western perspectives at all levels of intervention — mediation at the local community or institutional level and diplomatic negotiation. The different interventions are prescribed with little or no concern for the cultural contexts in question or the existing local traditions, institutions and resources (Center for Conflict Resolution, 11000). The centre maintained that a clear understanding of the cultural issues in any conflict situation would enhance the appropriate and effectiveness of the intervention process. Another area of concern is gender. It is asserted that empirical research has focused on whether men and women express and resolve conflict differently and, the differences in the styles of mediation used by men and women and their relation to the effectiveness of conflict resolution. However, studies have concluded that there are gender differences in conflict resolution behaviour and that these differences are influenced by a number of variables (context, power, status, gender of other parties). Besides, feminist critiques have expressed a concern with the male-constructed, generic theories of conflict and conflict resolution, which have excluded or downplayed issues such ad power balances, oppression and social roles. The argument here is that conflict resolution theories have pretended to be neutral in regard to gender, failing to consider the specific effects of conflict on roles of men and women.

Effectiveness: According to McShane and Glinow (1100III), effectiveness is the extent to which a team achieves its goals and objectives, the needs and objectives of its members and sustains itself over time. The concept of effectiveness relies on system theory, which has two main conclusions. The first is the effectiveness criteria must reflect the entire input-process-output cycles, and not simply the output, the second is that effectiveness criteria must reflect the interrelationships between the organization and its outside environment (Ivancevich, Konopaske and Matteson, 110ox). Effectiveness is the "what of change" (Ofoegbu, 1100v). According to Krietner, Kinicki

and Buelens (iiooii) for the principal to perform his stewardship well he must guide against conflict by adopting good conflict resolution strategies such as mediation, negotiation, accommodating, competing, compromise and collaboration.

Mediation and Its Effectiveness

Mediation is one of the third party conflict resolution process usually employed when individuals or groups in a conflict reach a stalemate and are unable to resolve their differences through direct one-on-one dialogue. According to Bodine, Crawford and Schrumpf (immv), mediation is a problem-solving process in which the two parties in the dispute or their representative meet face-to-face to work together to resolve the dispute assisted by a neutral third party called a mediator.

Negotiation and its Effectiveness

Negotiation permeates the interaction of almost everyone in groups and organizations. It occurs whenever two or more conflicting parties attempt to resolve their divergent goals by redefining the terms of their interdependence (Pruitt and Carnevale, immiii), and according to McShane and Glinow (iiooiii), people negotiate why they think that discussion can produce a more satisfactory arrangement.

Accommodating and its Effectiveness

In choosing an appropriate conflict resolution strategy, Crawford and Bodine (immm), asserted that there two major concern. These are, achieving goals and maintaining a good relationship with the other person. The balance the two determines whether they should withdraw, force/compete, smooth/accommodate/oblige, compromise or negotiate/solve the problem. According to Krietner, Kinicki and Buelens (iiooii), when people accommodate, oblige or smooth, they are meeting the needs of the other party, but not their own needs. When a person in a conflict neglects his or her own concern to satisfy the concerns of others, he or she is said to accommodate.

Competing and its Effectiveness

Competing is one of the five interpersonal conflict management strategies (Van de Vliert and Janseen, iiooi). It talks about a situation in which one of the disputants tries to be more successful or better than the other. According to Hoy and Miskel (iioox), competing is appropriate as a conflict management strategy in emergencies when quick, decisive actions are needed. It can also be applied when critical issues require unpopular action. For instance, cutting cost when issues are vital to the welfare of the organization, and against individuals who take unfair advantages of others.

Compromise and its Effectiveness

Compromise is a give-and-take approach involving moderate concern for both self and others. It tries to reach a middle ground with the other party through a willingness to give up something (Krietner, Kenicki and Buelens, iiooii). It is a process, where disputants must unconditionally give up something by the effort of the principal in the secondary school setting to allow harmony prevail in the school. According to Bodine, Crawford and Schrumpf (immv), compromising like avoiding and accommodating is a soft response to conflict situations usually occurring between individuals is a soft response to conflict situations usually occurring between individuals who want to be pleasant to each other because they will continue to have contact in future.

Collaboration and its Effectiveness

When parties to a conflict collaborate, they craft a plan of action with or without the assistance of a neutral party. The strategy has been identified by various researchers among whom are McShane and Glinow (IIOOIII), Killman (IIOOL), Robbins and Sanghi (IIOOC). Killman (IIOOL) posited that collaboration is a state in which both parties' needs are met, adding that it results from a high concern for self (assertiveness) and a high concern for others (cooperativeness). It is the only conflict resolution strategy that represents a pure win-win orientation (McShane and Glinow, IIOOIII; Robbins, IIOOX) because it tries to find a mutually beneficial solution for both parties through problem solving. An important feature to collaboration is information sharing in a bid to identify common ground and potential solutions that satisfies all parties to the conflict.

RESEARCH METHOD

Area of the Study

The study area is Akwa Ibom State which is one of the thirty six (IIIL) states of Federal Republic of Nigeria. It is bounded on the North by Abia State, on the South by the Atlantic Ocean, on the East by Cross River State and on the West by Rivers State.

Research Design

The study used the ex-post facto design. The ex-post facto design is considered necessary because the phenomena involved in the study has already occurred and the study seeks to establish the relationship between them without necessarily manipulating the variables.

Population of the Study

The population of the study comprises of all the IIIC principals and L.XIIO teachers in the Public Secondary Schools in Akwa Ibom State.

Sample and Sampling Techniques

The sample consisted of IVV principals and LXII teachers representing XO percent of principals and IO percent of public secondary school teachers, respectively. The sample was selected in stages using a multi cluster sampling technique.

Instrumentation

Two research-made instruments called "Conflict Resolution Strategies Questionnaire (CRSQ)" for principals and "Effectiveness of Conflict Resolution Strategies Questionnaire (ECRSQ)" for teachers were constructed for use.

The CRSQ had two sections. Section A sought information about gender of the principals while Section B had six sub-sections, each sub-section had four items each, which elicited information about a conflict resolution strategies used by the principals.

Validation of the Instrument

Two reliability was established using IIIO principals and XO teachers of public Secondary Schools, who did not take part in the final study. Data emanating from the tests was analysed using the Split-half reliability test.

Reliability of the instrument

The reliability was established using ιιιο principals and xo teachers of public Secondary Schools, who did not form part in the final study. Data emanating from the tests was analyzed using the Split-half reliability test.

Administration of the Instrument

The **CRSQ** and **ECRSQ** were administered by the researcher and some research assistants to principals and teachers of the selected public Secondary Schools of Akwa Ibom State. While ιιv of the **CRSQ** were administered to principals, ιχιι teachers responded to the **ECRSQ**. Completed copies of the questionnaires were collected on the spot since they were administered to the respondents in their offices. Besides, respondents were not allowed to go home with copies of the questionnaires to avoid wastage. This countered high mortality rate. Administered and collection of questionnaires lasted for two weeks.

Results and discussion

Research Question

How effective is mediation, negotiation, accommodating, competing, compromise and collaboration as conflict resolution strategies in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State.

Conflict Resolution Strategy	Mean	Weight Mean	Standard Deviation	Rank	Rating
Mediation	IV. MV	III. CV	0. MV	Ist	Effective
Negotiation	IV. OL	III. XII	I. VO	IIIrd	Effective
Accommodating	II. LD	II. MII	I. VL	Xth	Fairly Effective
Competing	II. IC	II. CM	I. III	Lth	Fairly Effective
Compromise	IV. XII	III. LIII	0. LO	IInd	Effective
Collaboration	IIII. IIIIII	III. IIIIII	I. VL	Vth	Effective

Results in Table I show that teachers perceive mediation, negotiation, compromise and collaboration as effective conflict resolution strategies. Their weighted means of III.CV, III.XII, III.LIII and III.IIIIIII are significantly higher than the cut-off mean of III.0. On the other hand, accommodating and competing are deemed fairly effective since their weighted means are below III.0 but above II.XO. The results agree with the opinion of Krietner, Kinicki and Buelens (IIOOII) who stated that for the principal to perform his stewardship well he must guide against conflict by adopting good conflict resolution strategies such as mediation, negotiation, accommodating, competing, compromise and collaboration.

Conclusion
The following conclusions are made based on the findings of this study:
I. Teachers perception mediation, negotiation, accommodating, competing, compromise and collaboration are effective conflict resolution strategies through a varying degrees.
II. The most preferred conflict resolution strategy by principals in secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State is collaboration, followed by accommodating, competing, mediation, negotiation and compromise respectively.

Recommendations
The following are the recommendations and implications based on the findings of this study:
I. Education providers, stakeholders and principals should be aware that it is better to employ a mix of conflict resolution strategies instead of a single strategy in resolving conflicts in secondary schools.
II. Regular training and seminars should be held for the principal and teachers to sharpen their knowledge on conflict resolution.

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