
SECONDARY SCHOOL CONFLICTS AND THE EFFECTIVENESS OF NEGOTIATION
AND COLLABORATION AS CONFLICT RESOLUTION STRATEGIES IN AKWA IBOM
STATE

By

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ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this study was to investigate into secondary school conflicts and the effectiveness of negotiation and collaboration as conflict resolution strategies in Akwa Ibom State. Two purposes of the study, two research questions and one hypothesis were raised. The study adopted an Ex-post facto correlational survey design method. The population of the study comprised all the public senior secondary school principals and teachers of senior secondary schools in Akwa Ibom state. A sample of 990 principals and teachers participated in the study. Cluster and Simple random sampling techniques were used to draw the sample. The instrument used for the study was titled "Secondary School Conflicts and Effectiveness of the Resolution Strategies Questionnaire (SSC-ERSQ)". It was recommended that, principals should always adopt the negotiation method of conflict resolution, where both parties involved tries to gain an advantage over the other by the end of the process as negotiation is intended to aim at compromise. Moreover, Principals should always see conflict as a managerial tool which they as school managers could utilize to guide the conflicting parties and to address what essentially are obstacles faced by the school whether as teacher-teacher conflict or principal – teacher conflict. Secondary school principals and teachers should, through collaborative behaviour, pool their creative energies to find innovative answers to conflicting problems.

Keywords: Conflict, Negotiation and Collaboration

Introduction

Conflict is believed to stem from many sources – from the individual, from group life and from interactions with the entire organisation. Based on Mulline (2005) interactions by members of a group could also constitute source of conflict. For example people who originate from different group/cultures may find the values and skill of other culture to be conflicting with their own behavioural patterns and skills. (Hoy Miskel, 2005, Mulins, 2005). For example people from different age group have conflicting values. Conflict may arise from the authority structure, from the managerial behaviours and leadership style and even from its channels of communication. Sources of conflict within the organisation as summarized by Mulins. (1996) include: differences between corporate and individual goals; conflict between the different groups within the organisation: conflict between informal and formal organisation; conflict between the manager and the managed; conflict between the individual and the job; and conflict between individuals (P.727).

People see things differently. Difference in perception results in different people attaching different meanings to the same stimuli. Value judgment of individuals can act as major sources of conflict. Sources of Conflict in Organisation are numerous as follows:

Limitation of resources is one of the sources of Conflict in Organisation. This is because the possessions by an organisation are most often limited. Conflict arises between members as the fight to have the share of the limited resources of the organisation. Departmental conflict is another source of conflict. Department tends towards and concentrates on the activities of their individual goals. If there is a need for them to co-operate, there might be conflict. Department who depend on one another may run into conflicts. If one delays another in accomplishing its goals. The results of conflict are not predetermined. A conflict may grow from simple to complex, from non-violent to violent depending on the gravity. However, beneficially resolved conflict can lead to quality final products. This might explain why Mayer (1995), asserted that learning to manage conflict is integral to a high-performance team. Conflict resolution is the process of resolving a dispute/conflict. Strategies, according to Deutsch and Coleman (2000) are the method and processes involved in facilitating peaceful ending of conflicts. Often, committed group members attempt to resolve group conflicts by actively communicating information about their conflicting motives or ideologies to the rest of the group (e.g., intentions; reasons for holding certain beliefs), and by engaging in collective negotiation (McNamara, 2007). A wide range of methods and procedures for addressing conflict exist, including but not limited to, negotiation, collaboration, mediation, etc. this study aims at assessing the effectiveness of negotiation and collaboration as conflict resolution strategies adopted by principals of secondary schools.

Negotiation is a key approach to the peaceful resolution of dispute and conflicts that may arise between parties. It is a direct process of dialogue and discussion taking place between at least two parties who are faced with a conflict situation or dispute. Both parties come to the realization that they have a problem, and both are aware that by talking to each other, they can find a solution to the problem. The benefits of a compromised solution it is believed, outweighs the losses arising from refusal to negotiate. In negotiation, there must be communication between two or more people intended to gain understanding, to produce agreement, to bargain between individuals involved in a conflict or dispute. Negotiation typically takes place during the early stages of conflict when communication between parties is cordial and good or at the de-escalation point when communication has been restored (Chikwe, 2011).

Collaboration as a conflict-handling mode, on the other hand, represents an attempt to channel conflict in a positive direction, thus enabling the manager to use conflict as a tool to resolve otherwise incompatible objectives within the organisation. In other words, this method of handling conflict acts less as a conflict intervention and more as true conflict management (Altman, 1994). The collaboration style is appropriate when the concerns are complex and a creative or novel synthesis of ideas is required. According to Thompson (2009), the downside of this approach is that the process of collaborating mandates sincere effort by all parties involved and it may require a lot of time to reach a consensus.

Statement of the Problem

In every organization there is problem of conflict between the management and the workers. In some cases, conflict exists between workers themselves. Conflict also exists in

public sectors. For instance, Public secondary schools experience various cases/degrees of conflicts. These conflicts include student/student, student/teacher, teacher/teacher and principal/teacher conflicts. Such inflict negative influences on the performance in school. Conflict prevents the principal in many ways in his/her quest for effective school administration that brings about high performance on the part of school. Some principals who face conflict in their place of work is always in a confused state and cannot supervise the workers to bring about high performance. This calls for good conflicts resolution strategies as shall be considered in this study.

Purpose of the study

The main purpose of this study was to investigate into secondary school conflicts and the effectiveness of negotiation and collaboration as conflict resolution strategies in Akwa Ibom State. The specific objectives are as follows:

1. To determine the effectiveness of negotiation in resolving principal-teacher conflicts in secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State as compared to other strategies.
2. To examine the effectiveness of collaboration in resolving teacher-teacher conflicts in secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State as compared to other strategies.

Significance of the Study

The Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO's), teachers, principals, parents and the students shall be beneficiaries of this research. They would benefit from the research findings given that this study will identify and solve the decadence of conflict in secondary schools. The study will also be of benefit to future researchers in similar filed including psychologist, and students of education.

Research Questions

The following research questions shall be answered it the course of the study:

- 1 To what extent is negotiation effective in resolving principal-teacher conflicts in secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State?
- 2 To what extent is collaboration effective in resolving teacher-teacher conflicts in secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State?

Research Hypotheses

The following hypothesis was formulated to guide the study:

1. There is no significant difference in effectiveness between negotiation and collaboration as conflict resolution strategies used by secondary school principals in Akwa Ibom State.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature is reviewed under two the following subheadings: social system theory; nature of conflict; negotiation and collaborative conflict resolution strategies.

Social System Theory by Getzels and Guba (1957)

The social system theory by Getzels and Guba (1957) views the school as a social institution with its own set of roles and expectations.

Each institution performs its own functions. Getzels and Guba (1957) conceived of a social institution as having both the nomothetic and the idiographic dimensions. According to Sylver (1983), the word nomothetic refers to the making and transmission of laws. Thus, the nomothetic dimension of the social system is the demand for lawful behaviour; behaviour which is orderly and predictable. It is the dimension which ensures that behaviour conforms to the rule and regulations of the system.

The idiographic dimension refers to the personal dimension, and is often considered at the psychological level of analysis of the social system. The idiographic (personal dimension) emphasizes the personality of the individuals who occupy the offices or who have statuses within an institution of the social educational system. The personalities of the individuals are perceived as their characteristic ways of thinking, feeling and acting, which make them unique and different from others. Getzels and Guba (1957) further postulated three types of conflicts that may rise from the interaction of nomothetic and the idiographic dimensions. They are differences between corporate and individual goals and conflict between the manager and the managed.

Nature of Conflict

According to Roloff (1987), organisational conflict occurs when members engage in activities or pursue goals and objectives that are incompatible with those of their colleagues (p. 496). In other words, conflict as an interactive process manifested in incompatibility, disagreement, or dissonance within or between social entities (that is, individuals, groups, organization members looking at conflict as an interactive process does not preclude the possibilities of intra- individual conflict, for it is known that a person often interacts with self as well as interacts with others. Birchler et al (2005)

Based on (Altman 2001), conflict may occur when a party engages in an activity that is incongruent with each other's needs or interests; when a party holds behavioural preferences, the satisfaction of which is incompatible with another person's. When a party wants some mutually desirable resource that is in short supply such that the wants of everyone may not be fully satisfied; when a party possesses attitudes, values, skills, and goals that are salient in directing his or her behaviour but are perceived to be exclusive of the attitudes, values, skills, and goals held by the other(s); when two parties have partially exclusive behavioural preferences regarding their joint actions; and when two parties are interdependent in the performance of functions or activities. This conceptualisation is much more inclusive, which implies that conflict can relate to incompatible preferences, goals, and not just activities. It should be recognized that in order for conflict to occur, it has to exceed the threshold level of intensity before the parties experience (or become aware of) any conflict. This principle of conflict threshold is consistent with Baron's (1990) tenet that opposed interests must be recognized by parties for conflict to exist.

Nevertheless, the primary concern here is with social conflict, that is, conflict between people whether they are acting as individuals, as members of groups, or as representatives of organisations or nations. Communication breakdown is often an important source of interpersonal conflict and learning communication skills is valuable in preventing and resolving such difficulties.

Negotiation Conflict Resolution Strategy and its Effectiveness in Resolving Conflicts in

Secondary Schools

According to Gates, (2011), negotiation is a dialogue between two or more people or parties, intended to reach an understanding; resolve point of difference or gain advantage in outcome of dialogue; to produce an agreement upon courses of action; to bargain for individual or collective advantage; to craft outcomes to satisfy various interests of two people/parties involved in negotiation process. Negotiation is a process where each party involved in negotiating tries to gain an advantage over the other by the end of the process. Negotiation is intended to aim at compromise.

Most people think of negotiation interactions as unstructured encounters. Before the party involved begin to bargain with each other, they spend a substantial amount of time exploring the relevant facts, economic considerations, and similar issues. Usually they spend not more than ten to fifteen minutes developing their bargaining strategies. When they commence such interactions, most individuals have only three things in mind pertaining to their actual negotiation strategy. These comprise: - where they plan to begin; - what they hope to achieve; and - their bottom lines. Between where they begin and where they end, they think of such encounters as entirely unstructured. It can be highly beneficial for negotiations to appreciate how structured bargaining interactions are, to enable them to recognize what stage they are in and to know what they should be doing in each stage.

The first stage is the most important, when the opposing parties do not yet conduct substantive discussions. At this "*Preparation Stage*" opposing parties must thoroughly plan their impending interactions (Charles, 2002). This is where they must carefully determine all the relevant factors that might influence their interactions. They determine the relevant factual, economic, and legal issues and the political or cultural considerations. They need to contact all the persons on their own side who might possess pertinent information to be sure that they obtain every information they need to assess the value of their situations. Once they have this information, they are likely to ask themselves three crucial questions. First, what happens to their side if they fail to reach agreements (Roger Fisher and William Ury 1981:p.146) like to call this their "Best Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement (BATNA)".

Once they have completed this part of the *Preparation Stage*, they should take a few minutes to plan their actual bargaining strategy. They should envision a few large concessions or a number of smaller position changes and they should plan the bargaining tactics to employ advance their interests. People who plan their interactions and who envision success usually achieve better results than less prepared cohorts (Hall 1999). When the *Preparation Stage* had been concluded, negotiators begin to interact substantively with the other side, in what is called the "*Preliminary Stage*" Bourges (1989). According to Charles (2002), this is where the parties should work to establish personal rapport and positive bargaining environments. Too many negotiators view their opponents as the enemy, and they begin with some hostility. They should appreciate the fact that in most situations their opponents are actually their friends -- they are enabling them to earn a living. They should take some time to establish first name relationships which personalize their discussions far more than impersonalized "Mr." and "Ms." interactions.

(Whetton, 1998). They should engage in some small talk about possible common interests that will enable them to become more friendly. Once they take a few minutes to establish such rapport, they enhance the likelihood that their interaction will be professional and courteous. They should also work to create positive bargaining environments. When this is accomplished, they increase the probability that they will reach agreements and the likelihood that they will generate mutually efficient accords (Thomas, 2004). Once they have agreed upon the final terms, they have successfully concluded the bargaining process (Omoluabi, 2001).

Empirical Review of Negotiation Conflict Resolution Strategy

The result of the study of Mugenda and Elvis (2003) seek out to examine the impact of negotiation as a conflict resolution strategy among secondary school students in Otioko in bayelsa state. The study found out that students-student conflict was due to theft of property, differences in opinions, disrespect for prefects, indiscipline of students, academic jealousy, rivalry for attention, negative attitude, discipline and boy-girl relationship. Moreover, the study reveals the intensity of the responses varied. Thirty nine (18.3%) of the respondents indicated that disrespect to prefects, 38(17.9%) differences in opinions, 35(16.5%) academic jealousy, 29(13.6%) rivalry for attention, 29 (13.6%) negative attitude, 17(8%) discipline,16 (7.5%) theft of property and 9(4.2%) boy-girl relationship. The respondents view on the causes of student-student conflict even though varied, indicated that disrespect for prefects, differences in opinions and academic jealousy highly caused conflict among students while theft of property and boy girl relationship were minimal causes of conflict. In conclusion, negotiation conflict resolution strategy is seen having a lot influence on curbing the menace of conflict among students in secondary schools.

Collaborative Conflict Resolution Strategy and its Effectiveness in Resolving Conflicts in Secondary Schools

This approach which is high on both assertiveness and cooperativeness is often described as the win-win scenario. (Zikmann, 1992). In the collaborative approach, both sides creatively work towards achieving the goals and desired outcomes of all parties involved.

Of the five modes of conflict resolution often described in a resolution matrix, only the strategy employing collaboration as a mode of conflict management which breaks free of the win-lose paradigm. The collaborating approach to conflict management represents the most beneficial mode for most types of conflict management. In the collaborating mode, conflict itself acts as a managerial tool. The manager utilizes conflict to guide the conflicting parties to address what essentially are obstacles faced by the organisation. Through collaborative behaviour, the conflicting parties pool their creative energies to find innovative answers to old problems. It is in this key respect that the collaborative mode of conflict management differs from the other four conflict-handling modes. Accommodating, avoiding, competing, and compromising—as permutations of the win-lose scenario are simply forms of conflict interventions.

Empirical Review of Collaborative Conflict Resolution Strategy

Carlinton, and Yeremi and Watto (2000) study examined the effect of collaborative conflict resolution strategy among secondary schools students in Adamawa State, Nigeria. Survey research design was used for the study. The population consisted of 457 secondary

schools in the state. Out of this, a sample of 322 was selected through simple random sampling techniques. Two instruments were used to collect the data. The data collected were analyzed using frequency counts, percentages, Pearson product moment correlation analysis, chi-square test. It was found that collaboration conflict resolution strategy was used in curbing the menace of anti-social behavior problem like fighting, bullying, stealing etc. among students. The study concluded that is a good strategy for curbing the decadence of anti-social behavior in Adamawa State.

Summary of Literature Review

The review of the theoretical framework was followed by the review of rare beer of investigation starting with effectiveness of negotiation as a conflict resolution strategy. Negotiation conflict resolution strategy was recognized as having a lot of influence on resolving conflicts in secondary schools. According to the review, collaborative conflict resolution strategy finds a solution that satisfies both of party's needs. Parties might not get everything they want, but they get enough of what they need to feel satisfied.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The research design used for the study was Ex-post facto correlational design.

Area of the Study

The study area is Akwa Ibom State.

The Study population

The population of the study comprised all the public senior secondary school principals and teachers of senior secondary schools in Akwa Ibom state. There are 234 principals and 19,624 teachers distributed into 234 public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State (Statistical Department of Akwa Ibom State Secondary Education Board, 2013).

Sample and Sampling Technique

A sample size of 250 respondents was used for the study. The samples were obtained through cluster and random sampling techniques. Teachers in the state will be clustered into senatorial districts. The "hat and draw" random sampling technique was used in selecting 10 percent of teachers from each senatorial district and the purposive sampling technique was used for selecting the principals by taking the principals from schools where the teachers were selected.

Instrumentation

The main instrument of research was a researcher-developed questionnaire called the 'Secondary School Conflicts and Effectiveness of the Resolution Strategies Questionnaire (SSC-ERSQ)''.

Validation of the Research Instruments

The instrument was face and content validated by an expert in test, measurement and evaluation. The corrections and comments were incorporated into the final form of the instrument.

Reliability of the Instruments

The Cronbach coefficient alpha reliability technique was used to test the reliability of the instrument (SSC-ERSQ) and the result proved adequate reliability coefficient of 0.83 which proved that the instrument was reliable enough for use in the study.

Statistical Treatment of Data

The collected data was coded and extracted from the questionnaire for analysis. The statistical techniques used for the analysis were descriptive statistics (mean) and standard deviation while simple regression analysis was used to analyse the hypotheses. All the hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance. Comparison of mean would be used to compare the degree of effectiveness of each conflict resolution strategy.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The results of the data analysis proved the negotiation strategy with mean values of 19.28, to be more effective than that of collaboration (16.12) with mean difference of 3.16. Performing independent t-test analysis on them the result proved that there is significant difference in effectiveness between negotiation and collaboration conflict resolution strategies used by secondary school principals in Akwa Ibom State to resolve conflict in their individual schools as the calculated t-value (16.72) was greater than the critical t-value (1.96) at 0.05 alpha level with 248 degree of freedom.

The finding agrees with the finding of Mugenda and Elvis (2003), which, proved the use of negotiation strategy very effective as it also found out that students-student conflict was due to theft of property, differences in opinions, disrespect for prefects, indiscipline of students, academic jealousy, rivalry for attention, negative attitude, discipline and boy-girl relationship. Moreover, the study revealed the intensity of the responses varied. Thirty nine (18.3%) of the respondents indicated that disrespect to prefects, 38 (17.9%) differences in opinions, 35 (16.5%) academic jealousy, 29 (13.6%) rivalry for attention, 29 (13.6%) negative attitude, 17 (8%) discipline, 16 (7.5%) theft of property and 9 (4.2%) boy-girl relationship. The respondents view on the causes of student-student conflict even though varied, indicated that disrespect for prefects, differences in opinions and academic jealousy highly caused conflict among students while theft of property and boy girl relationship were minimal causes of conflict. The significance of the result caused the null hypothesis to be rejected while the alternative one was retained.

Conclusion

Secondary school principals adopt various conflict resolution strategies to resolve conflict. Negotiation conflict resolution strategy is seen having a lot influence on curbing the menace of conflict among students in secondary schools. Finally, negotiation strategy is more effective than the collaboration strategy in resolving conflicts in schools.

Recommendations

The study recommends that, principals should always adopt the negotiation method of conflict resolution, where both parties involved tries to gain an advantage over the other by the end of the process as negotiation is intended to aim at compromise.

Principals should always see conflict as a managerial tool which they as school managers could utilize to guide the conflicting parties and to address what essentially are obstacles faced by the school whether as teacher-teacher conflict or principal – teacher conflict. Secondary school principals and teachers should, through collaborative behaviour, pool their creative energies to find innovative answers to conflicting problems.

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