CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES (CMS): BUILDING AN INNOVATIVE TEAM AND KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT IN NIGERIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM

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Abstract
Solving problems in today's organization requires building effective team and knowledge banks of personnel. In any functional team, cohesion amongst team leaders and decision makers is vital. This paper focuses on innovativeness of human resources management in building team and innovative personnel management through constructive conflict management strategies in Nigeria Education system. Conflict is perceived as inevitable in every educational institution. It is believed that every organization is prone to conflict as long as individuals in the organization relates with one another. The concepts of conflicts was examined, conflict management and staff development in educational institutions. It was recommended among others that school administrators should be well trained in conflict management strategies for effective human resource management and staff development.

Keywords: Conflict, Management, Innovation, Team Management, Knowledge Management

Education in Nigeria nowadays is operating in a turbulent environment due to irregular payment of teachers' salaries and allowances, unpredictable academic calendar, cultism, students' riot among other vices which often generate conflict in the system. Conflict is generally regarded as disagreement regarding interests or ideas. Organizational conflict may be regarded as the 'discord' that occurs when the goals, interests or values of different individuals or groups are incompatible with those of individuals or groups block or frustrate each others in an attempt to achieve their objectives. Conflict is inevitable part of organizational life since the goals of different stakeholders such as school administrators and staff are often incompatible (Jones, Gorge and Hill, 2000). Conflict is an ever-present process in human relations. That is why educational administrators should understand the strategies of conflict management and dynamics of human

behavior in the educational system for effective school administration.

Conflict-stimulation Strategy in Organization's Team and Knowledge Management

Conflict improves group and organizational effectiveness. The stimulation of conflict initiates the search for new means and goals and provides the stimulus for innovation. The successful solution of a conflict leads to greater effectiveness, trust, openness, and better relationship among members of the organization. Conflict is a means to bring about radical change. It is an effective device by which management can drastically change the existing power structure, current interaction patterns, and entrenched attitudes. Conflict facilitates group cohesiveness. Whereas conflict increases hostility between groups, external threats tend to cause a group to pull together as a unit. Inter-group conflicts raise the extent to which members identify with their own group and increase feelings of solidarity.

Conflict could bring about a slightly higher and more constructive level of tension. When the level of tension is very low, the parties are not sufficiently motivated to do something about a conflict. Groups or organizations devoid of conflict are likely to suffer from apathy, stagnation, groupthink, and other debilitating diseases. In fact, more organizations probably fail because they have too little conflict, not because they have too much. Take a look at a list of large organizations that have failed or suffered serious financial setbacks over the past decade or two. The common trend among through these organizations is that they are stagnated. Their management became complacent and unable or unwilling to facilitate change. These organizations could have benefited from functional conflict.

Conflict stimulation is also a measure to solve conflict in the educational system. In traditional concept, conflict was taken as a threat to organizational effectiveness. Nowadays, a system could stimulate conflict to effect desired changes and innovation. A system devoid of conflict should perceive danger or threat to its survival. Conflict is therefore an index of development. Therefore it is necessary for educational administrators to be conscious of inevitability of conflict and conflict management strategies in the system. The following strategies could be used to stimulate conflict in educational system:

- Participatory decision making among the staff members and the school administrator could elicit different opinions, ideas, suggestions and constructive argument so that superior argument is considered for administrative effectiveness.

- Redeployment of staff to relevant offices or assignment to acquire more experiences, learn on the job and learn to relate with other members of staff could as well stimulate conflict, improve workers professional competence and productivity.

- By changing current design of organization, functional conflict can be created. With the help of restructure, the size of organization could be changed.

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This is a process of introducing changes and innovations to the structure of the system in line with the current technological development.

- Employees certificate verification and personnel audit in education system could be used to elicit functional conflict, reduce wastage and authenticate the quality and quantity of staff.

Conflict Management Strategies in Education

Conflict Management is the practice of being able to identify and handle conflict sensibly, fairly and efficiently. Since conflicts in a business are natural parts of the workplace, it is important that there are people who understand conflicts and know how to resolve them (Ewanegbo, 2005).

Conflict management is also the act of practicing or recognizing and dealing with disputes in a rational, balanced and effective way. Conflict management implemented within a business environment usually involves effective communication. Wherever there are people, there will always be conflict. Managers have to deal with conflict in the workplace every day. Conflict management is the ability to be able to identify and handle conflicts sensibly and efficiently (Folarin, 2008).

Some of the conflict management strategies that may be employed by educational administrators for effective human resources and staff development are the following:

Accommodating: An accommodating educational administrator is one who cooperates to a high degree with members of the school community. This may be at the administrator's own expense and actually mean working against that administrator's own goals, objectives and desired outcomes. This strategy could be employed when it is important to provide a temporary relief from the conflict or buy time until the school administrator's position to respond/push back, when the issue is not as important to you as it is to the other person, when one accept that he is wrong, when the administrator have no choice or when continued competition would be detrimental.

Collaborating: A collaborating educational administrator become partners or pair up with the subordinate to achieve their goals in this style. This is how managers break free of the win-lose paradigm and seek the win-win. This can be effective for complex scenarios where managers need to find a novel solution. This strategy could be employed when consensus and commitment of other parties are important, in a collaborative environment, when it is required to address the interest of multiple stake holders, when a high level of trust is present, when a long term relationship is important, when there is need to work through hard feelings, animosity, and when administrators do not want to have full responsibility. Some of the benefits of collaboration are: solving the actual problem, win-win outcome, reinforcement of mutual trust and respect, builds a

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foundation for effective collaboration in the future, shared responsibility of the outcome and earned reputation of a good neighbor

Caveats of Collaborating

• requires a commitment from all parties to look for a mutually acceptable solution

• may require more effort and more time than some other methods. a win-win solution may not be evident

• for the same reason, collaborating may not be practical when timing is crucial and a quick solution or fast response is required

Competing: This is the win lose approach. Educational administrators act in a very assertive way to achieve his or her goals without seeking to co-operate with other employees and it may be at the expense of those other employees. This approach may be appropriate for emergencies when time is of the essence. It can be called forcing. This strategy could be employed in certain situations when all other less forceful methods don't work or are ineffective, when there is need to stand up for your rights, resist aggression and pressure, when a quick resolution is required and using force is justified especially in a life-threatening situation, to stop an aggression, as a last resort to resolve a long lasting conflict. Benefits of competing could include: quick resolution to conflict, increases self-esteem and draws respect, resistance to an aggression or hostility.

Caveats of Forcing

• May negatively affect relationship with the opponent in the long run

• May cause the opponent to react in the same way, even if the opponent did not intend to be forceful originally

• Cannot take advantage of the strong sides of the other side's position

• Taking this approach may require a lot of energy and be exhausting to some individual

Compromising: This is the los-lose scenario where neither subordinate nor manager really achieves what they want. This requires a moderate level of assertiveness and co-operation. It may be appropriate for scenarios where you need a temporary solution or where both sides have equally important goals. This strategy could be employed when the goals are moderately important and not worth the use of more assertive or more involving approach such as forcing or collaborating, to reach temporary settlement on complex issues, to reach expedient solutions on important issues, as a first step when involved parties do not know each other well or not haven't yet developed a high level of mutual trust and when collaborating or forcing do not work. Benefits of withdrawing may include:

Possible Advantages of Compromising

• May be more practical when time is a factor

• Can provide a temporary solution while still looking for a win-win solution

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- Lowers the level of tension and stress from the conflict

Caveats of Using Compromise

- May result in a situation where both parties are not satisfied with the outcome (a lose- lose situation)
- Does not contribute to building trust in the long run
- May require close monitoring and control to ensure the agreements are met

Avoiding: It is also known as withdrawing way a manager might attempt to resolve conflict. This type of conflict style does not help the other staff members reach their goals and does not help the manager who is avoiding the issue and cannot assertively pursue his or her own goals. However, this works well when the issue is trivial or when the manager has no chance of winning.

Withdrawing or Avoiding may be Appropriate

- when the issue is trivial and not worth the effort
- when more important issues are pressing and you don't have time to deal with it
- in situations where postponing the response is beneficial
- when it is not the right time or place to confront issue
- when time is needed to think and collect information before you act
- when there is need to deal with hostility

Caveats of Withdrawing

- may lead to weaken or loosen position because not acting may be interpreted as an agreement using withdrawing strategies without negatively affecting ones position requires certain skill and experience
- when multiple parties are involved, withdrawing may negatively affect your relationship with a party that expects action

Possible Advantages of Avoidance

- When the opponent is forcing/attempt aggression there is need to withdraw and postpone response until administrators are in a more favourable circumstances to push back
- Withdrawing could be low stress approach when conflict is short.
- Gives the ability/time to focus on more important issue instead
- Gives time to better prepare and collect information before acting

Team Management in Education

Team management has become an essential task of many educational institutions at all levels.

Anit, Helena and Helena (2009) define team management as the various activities which bind a team together by bringing the team members closer to achieve the set targets. For the team members, their team must be their priority and everything else should take a back seat. They should be very focused on their goals. What characterizes such a team is the participation of the members of school

staff in the decision-making process. This definition is based on the social science literature, which reveals that groups reach more creative decisions than do individuals (Stein, 1982 as cited in Johnason, 2009).

The concept of management team may be analyzed in terms of two aspects: the structural aspect and the process aspect. Regarding the first aspect, Erickson & Gmelch (1977) and Sabina (2010) identify several types of administrative team structures. The horizontal team includes the school principals and deputies. The vertical team includes the principal and the heads of department. The composite team includes representatives of the rank and file teaching staff, as well as school administrators.

With reference to the process aspect of the management teams, several authors (Wood, 1984; Likert, 1967; Blumberg, 1968; Jane, 2005) argue that there are a number of possible modes of operation for such a team. In the autocratic mode, the school principal provides the team members with information, but they do not contribute their ideas or suggestions. Decisions, direction and supervision remain the realm of the principal alone. The consultative mode, also known as decision-making by consultation, has two versions. According to the first, the principal seeks general information and suggestions from subordinates prior to making a decision, but does not ask them to generate or to evaluate alternative solutions. Decision-making and direction are still in the principal's hands, but team members and

other teachers may be consulted. In the second version, the principal presents a problem to the team members and other teachers, who may then offer advice. In this case, the principal presents the problem that he or she seeks to solve. Thus the team members have an opportunity to work together with the principal in considering all possible consequences of a proposed action. However, the principal retains the right and responsibility for making the final decision. In the participative mode, the principal and team members may share and analyze problems together, generate and evaluate alternatives and attempt either to reach agreement by compromise (the consensus version) or to arrive at the decision by majority.

Team Management Models

Teams are the principal building blocks of strategy for successful organizations. The focus of an organization may be on service, quality, cost, value, speed, efficiency, performance, or any other similar goals, but teams remain the central methodology of most organizations in the private, non-profit, as well as government sectors. The fact remains that when a team becomes more aligned, a commonality of direction emerges, and the individual energies harmonize. This way there is a shared vision as well as an understanding of how to complement each other's efforts. As a school administrator, once you know the type of team you are in, it may be helpful to choose how to plan work and what can be expected as outcomes.

There are various types of teams, and the five of which were highlighted as may be relevant to school administration are:

- **The Traditional Model:** This is a group of people with a traditional boss. The boss also shares some of his/her responsibility as well as authority. How much is being shared by the boss is usually dependent on the issues under consideration. This traditional boss is in charge. But on certain issues, the school head may allow his other team members to take on the leadership role.

- **The Cutting Edge Model**: This is a group of people who manages themselves. There is no single person in this group who has the authority to make any such decisions about the events which will impact the whole group. This is also known as a self-directed work team. Each one has the authority as well as responsibility for all the decisions that they have to make.

- **The Task Force Model**: This refers to a group that comes together for a specific time only. This is because it has to work on a special project or a task. Such a group has traditionally been called a task force or a committee. This may also include quality circles as are used in Task Quality Management (TQM) efforts.

- **The Cyber Team**: In such a team model, members see one another rarely or even, not at all. These are also known as "cyber" or "virtual" teams. What makes these teams different is that the team has to work together in order to accomplish goals, but they may be meeting only at the beginning of their project. Post that, they may be interacting through e-mail, telephone or through video conferencing only.

Dimension and Strategies of Knowledge Management (KM)

Knowledge Management (KM) is the systematic capture of experiences to make organization identify, create, and distribute knowledge. The insights of individuals in the organization comprise the knowledge that is created in the organization. It functions to capture, store, and disseminate knowledge with aid of digital inherent in the organization to disseminate knowledge. Its objective enhances organizational competitiveness, improve performance. Typically, organizations have well-established software to make learning accessible.

The goal of a successful KM system is to involve employees in the decision making of the 'system'. Apart from this, to actualize a successful KM system, hierarchy, barriers to knowledge sharing must be eliminated. This implies that a culture of 'openness' may help the flow of knowledge through the organizational arteries.

There are several dimensions to Knowledge Management (KM) and the most popular framework distinguishes between 'tacit' knowledge and 'explicit' knowledge. Tacit knowledge refers to the internalized knowledge that individuals in an organization possess. On the other

hand, explicit knowledge is the knowledge that individuals in organizations know that they have and are conscious of it. The crucial element in any Knowledge Management system is to ensure that tacit knowledge is captured and converted to explicit knowledge. Moreover, it has been hypothesized that even explicit knowledge needs to be converted into information that is meaningful and useful. After all, mere data is not useful, it is only when data is transformed into information and codified as knowledge that is to useful.

There are different strategies to capture knowledge and they include the "push" and the "pull" strategies. First, it must be made clear that knowledge can be captured before, during, and after the processes are actualized. Hence, incentives are vital for employees to contribute to the knowledge base. The push strategy focuses on making employees contribute to the Knowledge Management system in a proactive manner. This approach is also known as the codification approach to Knowledge Management. Another strategy is the pull strategy wherein individuals make explicit requests to those who possess knowledge. In this case, the experts are called upon requests, hence the knowledge seeker pulls the information rather than the expert pushing the information. This approach is known as the personalization approach to Knowledge Management.

Many advantages accrue to organizations that have efficient knowledge management systems. These include reducing the iterations in subsequent projects, leveraging existing knowledge to improve on the processes, achieving synergies between processes and functions, and generally improving productivity because of the convergence of all these aspects. The key aspect about having an efficient knowledge management system is that one need not reinvent the wheel. In other words, organizations can derive benefits from the knowledge that is present in the system and hence, reduce the work needed to do the same or similar tasks again. For instance, if a particular organization has stored knowledge about previous projects in the KM system, then subsequent projects having the same or similar kind of tasks or deliverables can benefit from the existing knowledge by reusing the artifacts, documents, and knowledge units that are there in the KM system. This reduces iterations for projects as the similar deliverables can be submitted without having to redo the same thing repeatedly. This is one of the most important reasons why corporates go in for KM systems as having an efficient KM system results in quantum jumps in productivity.

Conclusion

Conflict is inevitable in every organization. The reason is, individuals in the organization hold different values, perception and interest. The knowledge of conflict stimulation and management strategies is therefore germaine to effective human resources management. Therefore, effective team management by school administrators enhances team effectiveness, positive change and

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innovations in the system. Team development creates a enabling environment, team work, cooperation and builds a trustworthy knowledge based management.

Recommendations

It is on the above basis that recommendations are suggested as follows:

• Constructive conflict should be stimulated by school heads to ensure coordinated work team

• School administrators should be well trained in conflict management strategies for effective human resource management and staff development.

• With the help of team management activities, educational managers should create a positive ambience at the workplace and promote healthy competition in the team.

• School heads should understand the right model to use in order to accomplish organizational goals.

• A well structured organization reduces redundancies in digital age of involving post modernism.

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