

IMPERATIVES OF CONFLICT MANAGEMENT FOR ORGANISATIONAL PERFORMANCE IN FEDERAL POLYTECHNICS IN SOUTH EAST, NIGERIA

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Abstract: Conflict is inevitable among human beings, especially those whose dealings and interactions are confined within the framework of a complex organizational setting. Managing conflicts in academic institutions like the polytechnics has important implications for the creation of the much needed enabling environment for academic excellence, research and innovation. Thus, the imperatives of conflict management for organisational performance in Federal Polytechnics in South East, Nigeria, which is the focus of this study tend to specifically determine the relationship between the institution's trade unions and performance of Federal Polytechnics in South-East, Nigeria and to examine the relationship between management communication channels and performance of Federal Polytechnics in South-East, Nigeria. The study adopted a survey approach with a population of 9594 academic and non-academic staff of the three Federal Polytechnic in the South-East, Nigeria. Using the Taro Yamane formula, a sample size of 400 was obtained. The study revealed, among others that there is no relationship between the institution's trade unions and performance of Federal Polytechnics in South-East, Nigeria. Based on the findings of the study, the researcher recommended, among others that labour unions should see themselves as partners in progress and that communication channels should be strengthened and expanded to ensure that all segments of the organization are covered in the communication process.

Keywords: Conflict, Conflict Management, Performance, Communication, Trade union.

1. INTRODUCTION

A complex organizational setting like a polytechnic has people with diverse backgrounds, interests and orientations. This is even more pronounced in any federal institution in Nigeria where the recruitment policy tends to cater for different segments of the society. Thus, with limited resources and opportunities, there is bound to be conflict of interest arising from role differentiation, division of functions and power relations (Azamosa 2004). Other notable causes of organizational or workplace conflict are communication problems, individual differences as well as clashes of interest between the employees and the employers. In all, a poorly managed conflict situation impacts negatively on the core vision and mission of the organization.

In Nigeria, the primary objective of polytechnic education in Nigeria is to produce in depth technical manpower in administrative, technical and commercial fields for the development of national economy. The sensitive position of polytechnics in the Nigerian educational system is vividly captured by the 2002 education summit organized by the

Federal Ministry of Education. In the summit, polytechnics were recognized as authentic tertiary educational institutions on the same pedestal as universities, but with its own characteristic orientation towards the production of technological manpower and technological innovation for industrial development in Nigeria. In the same vein, section 80(c) of the National policy on Education 2004, states that “polytechnics shall give training and impart necessary skills that will fast track the nation’s drive towards technological development as well as producing graduates who can prove themselves worthy men and women and who are able to use their brain as adequately as they can apply their hands. Notwithstanding the functions and stated objectives, evidence on ground shows that many polytechnics are not capable of realizing these objectives due to frequent issue of conflict amongst the stakeholders (Management, Government, Unions as well as the Students). This is true because the management of these polytechnics as pointed out by Obi (2003) seem not to involve all the stakeholders in their efforts to achieve goals. Thus, managing conflicts in such institution of higher learning as polytechnics is a complex task which requires sufficient expertise in administration, communication, handling of staff related issues, financial management, and maintenance of structures, facilities and equipment. The principal and the sub-structures of the institution are to provide the necessary vertical and horizontal links as well as interrelationships that ensure maximum potentials for communication and understanding, applying the right measure to manage the overall conflict, becomes imperative to its administrative responsibility because this is one problem any administration in an organisation will want to put more interest in, by deploying all available resources, in order to improve its performance toward socio-economic development. Conflict management involves designing effective strategies to minimize the dysfunctional effect of conflict and enhance the constructive functions in order to optimize learning and effectiveness of an organisation (Rahim, 2002). The need to adopt the right measures in conflict management is important because of the numerous challenges it brings to the growth and development of the organisation (Okoye, 2014).

The incidence of conflicts within polytechnic community has been affecting the basic environmental conditions required for effective teaching, learning and research in federal polytechnics in South East Nigeria. The seemingly chaotic situation is said to have undermined many programmes aimed at enhancing knowledge and skills in the various polytechnics. Evidence has showed that the Federal Polytechnics in south-east in particular has experience several cases of conflicts often resulting into strike actions especially between the various staff unions in the institution and the government as well as the staff unions and management. Some of the issues that generates conflicts borders on the following:

- Poor working conditions
- Appointment of unqualified persons into sensitive positions
- Management undue interference in labour union activities
- poor communication between the management, unions and the government
- Non implementation of past agreement among others.

Allowing conflict to fester has been one of the major undoing of government and management of higher institutions with its adverse effect on performance of both the institution as well as the student. Thus this paper, seeks to examine the relationship between conflict management and performance focusing on Federal Polytechnics in South-East, Nigeria.

Objective of the study

The broad objective of this study is to examine the imperatives of conflict management for organizational performance in federal polytechnics in South East, Nigeria.

The specific objectives of the study are:

1. To determine the relationship between the institution’s trade unions and performance of Federal Polytechnics in South-East, Nigeria
2. To examine the relationship between management communication channels and performance of Federal Polytechnics in South-East, Nigeria

Research Questions

Answers were sought for the following research questions.

1. What is the nature of relationship between the institution's trade unions and performance of Federal Polytechnics in South-East, Nigeria?
2. What is the relationship between management communication channels and performance of Federal Polytechnics in South-East, Nigeria?

Research Hypotheses

In order to achieve the objectives of this study the following hypotheses questions were formulated:

1. There is no significant relationship between the institution's trade unions and performance of Federal Polytechnics in South-East, Nigeria
2. There is no significant relationship between management communication channels and performance of Federal Polytechnics in South-East, Nigeria.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Review: Conflict and Organizational Conflict

Conflict has been defined in several ways by many authors. Rahim (2001) sees conflict as an interactive process manifested in incompatibility, disagreement or dissonance within or between social entities (that is individual, groups, organization etc.). This view is consistent with Janbrek and Penic (2008) descriptions of conflict as a process of social interaction and social situation, where interest and activities of participants (individuals or groups) actually or apparently, confront, block and disable the realization of one party's objectives. Organizational conflict occurs when members engage in activities that are incompatible with those of colleagues or unaffiliated individual who utilize the service or products of the organization, River (2005). It is an inevitable clash of interest and resulting contest of varying intensity between and within any or all of the active stakeholders in organizations.

Robbins & Sanghi (2005) identified three types of organizational conflict as:

1. **Task conflict:** This relates to the content and goals of the work. It is the conflict that occurs as a result of the content and goal of the work.
2. **Relationship conflict:** It focuses on interpersonal incompatibilities among groups members. It includes personal clashes, revisions, animosity etc. this relates to how the work gets done in an organization.
3. **Process conflict:** These relate to the process of doing the actual work. It is the conflict that occurs on the actualizing the goal. It could be on the job description and specialization.

Conflict Management

Conflict management as a concept has been conventionally associated with conflict containment and settlement. Onwuchekwa (2007) opines that conflict management is a way of managing organizational conflict so as to keep it at a level where it will not result in disorganizing the activities of an organization thereby resulting in not achieving or allowing effective attainment of organizational objectives. From this definition, it means that conflict when not well managed; it can cause so many problems in the organization. It can lead to perceived breach of trust and faith between individuals, units, departments, lead to personality clashes and underlying tension and stress etc. Kazimoto (2013) sees conflict management as an implementing strategy to limit the negative aspects of conflict and increase the positive aspects of conflict at a level of equal to or higher than where the conflict is taking place. Furthermore, the aim of conflict management is to enhance learning and group outcomes that are 'effectiveness or performance in organizational setting. It is in the view that Uchendu, Amjaobi & Odigwe (2013) opine that since conflict is inevitable in organizations, its management determines whether it will generate positive or negative effect on the organizational performance. To Awan and Anjum (2015) asserted that properly managed conflict promotes open communication, collaborative decision making, regular feedback and timely resolution of conflict. To Rahim (2002), an effective conflict management strategy should:

- (1) Minimize affective conflict at various levels.
- (2) Attain and maintain a moderate amount of substantive conflict.
- (3) Select and use appropriate conflict management strategies

Performance

One of the important questions in business has been why some organization succeeds while other failed. Performance has been the most important issue for every organization be it profit or no profit organization. It has been very important for managers to know what influence their organization's performance in order for them to take appropriate steps to initiate them.

In the views of Griffin (2006), organizational performance is described as the extent to which the organization is able to meet the needs of its stakeholders and its own needs for survival. Hence performance should not be wholly equated with certain profit margin high market share or having the best product although they may result from fully achieving the description of performance. To Griffin (2006) organizational performance is influenced by multitude factors that are combined in unique ways to both enhance and detract performance. Performance measures could be grouped into six general categories; effectiveness, efficiency, cost, quality timelessness, innovation and productivity. Within any corporate organisation or public institution like Polytechnics; the common measure of the organizational performance are effectiveness and efficiency. Their main focus is to achieve their mission, goals and vision. The performance measurement may be based on efficiency service delivery. Efficiency here refers to the relationship between output and input. Efficiency service delivery can be said to be an effective operation produces maximum input for any given quantity and quality (Eneanya, 2009).

Empirical Review

Uchendu, Anijaobi & Odigwe (2013) examined the relationship that exists between conflict management and organization performance in cross river state, Nigeria. The authors employed questionnaires to gather their data. The instrument was a 4 points Likert type scale consisting 32 items. Person's product moment coefficient analysis was used in analyzing the data. The result of the analysis revealed that, there is a significant relationship between principal's conflict management in terms of Teacher-Teacher Conflict (TTC), Teacher-Student Conflict (TSC), Principal Teacher Conflict (PTC) and organizational performance.

Ajike, Akinlabi, Magaji & Sonubi (2015) in their study "Effect of Conflict Management on the Performance of Financial Service Organization in Nigeria: An empirical study of Access Bank Plc". It sought to assess empirically the effect of conflict management on organization performance in banking industry in Nigeria. A sample size of eight-one (81) out of numerous banks in Lagos state was used. A descriptive and regression analysis with the aid of SPSS was used to analyze the relationship between conflict management and organizational performance ($r=0.715$; $p<0.05$). The finding of the study revealed that conflict management in Nigerian banking industry impact positively on organizational performance and effective conflict management style reduces banking crisis in Nigeria.

Nebo, Nwankwo & Okonkwo (2015) examined the Role of Effective Communication on Organizational Performance, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The problem that led to the study is the disputes and delays in the access to information that would increase performance of staff. The survey research method was adopted for the study and the study relied much on secondary and primary data. The population of this research work was drawn from the Academic and Non-academic staff of UNIZIK. The population is made up of 170 non-academic and 130 Academic Staff. The sample size of 166 was determined using Taro Yamane technique and stratified random sampling. Chi-square was used to analysis the hypotheses. The findings from the study show that effective communication is the remedy to effective and efficient management performance of employees in an organization

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Contingency theory was adopted for this study. It originated with the work of Joan Woodward (1958). This theory lends credence to this study, because there is no best way to make a decision or manage an organisation as the choice of action or outcome dependent upon the external or internal situation and successful decision making is said to be dependent upon these internal and external factors influencing the system. Contingency theory is applicable in this study, because the accomplishment of the goals and objectives for which polytechnics are established depends on effective management of the different areas that constitute the polytechnic as an open and social system, especially the provision of services that will make the staff achieve all round development. If the staff of polytechnics are not given due attention, it will form a constraint to the attainment of the objectives of the polytechnic. Based on the contingency principle, every conflict management measure has its place, depending on the relationship and goals of the conflicting parties, different measures may need to be applied.

4. METHODOLOGY

The research design adopted for this study was survey research design. The study was conducted in South Eastern Nigeria and it covered Federal Polytechnics in the area. The data was obtained through primary and secondary data. The population of the study consists of the staff of the three federal polytechnics in South East Nigeria with the total number of nine thousand, five hundred and ninety-four staff. Taro Yamani Formula was adopted to determine the optimum sample size of 400. The data collected for the study was through the administration of copies of structured questionnaires on a four-point Likert scale to illicit information from the respondents. The sample size of 400 was determined using Taro Yamane technique and stratified random sampling. Content validity, was used for this study to measure a concept by logical analysis of the item and a test-re-test exercise will be adopted using Pearson product moment correlation formula on the instrument randomly before it will be certified to be reliable. The data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics; mean scores to answer the research questions while inferential statistics such as Pearson correlation analysis was adopted in the test of hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

5. DATA PRESENTATION AND FINDINGS

The presentation will take the form of tabulation followed by the analysis, explanation and interpretation of the data collected from the questionnaire.

Research Question 1: What is the nature of relationship between the institution's trade unions and performance of Federal Polytechnics in South-East, Nigeria?

The data for providing answers to the above research questions are presented on table 1 below.

Table 1: Mean scores of respondents' responses on the nature relationship between the institution's trade unions and performance of Federal Polytechnics in South-East, Nigeria.

S/N	QUESTIONS	ΣFx	\bar{X}	Decision
1	Management tries to work with the unions to find solution to the problem which will satisfy their expectations and enhance performance of the institution.	605	1.8	Disagree
2	Management and staff unions work together to actualize the goals and objective of their institution	720	2.2	Disagree
3	When the expectations of the unions are met, it improves their ability to work thereby enhancing their overall performance.	996	3.0	Agree
4	Impact of staff unions in your institution cannot be overemphasized.	1061	3.2	Agree
5	Good relationship between the staff unions and the management creates harmonious environment for staff productivity.	1023	3.1	Agree

Source: Field Survey, 2019

Table 1 focuses on the first research question which is on the nature of relationship between the institution's trade unions and performance of Federal Polytechnics in South-East, Nigeria. This section has six statements. The first statement that management tries to work with the unions to find solution to the problem which will satisfy their expectations and enhance performance of the institution was disagreed to as the mean score of the responses from the respondents is 1.8, below the 2.5 threshold. Respondents also disagreed to the assertion that management and staff unions work together to actualize the goals and objective of their institution. This is because if they actually 'work together,' then the constant disagreements that have become commonplace will not arise. The third to fifth statements were all agreed to by the respondents. They agree that when the expectations of the unions are met, it improves their ability to work thereby enhancing their overall performance. The agreement to this assertion is not out of place as most of the respondents, are union member, either academic or non-academic. This also informed their agreement to the fourth statement that the impact of staff unions in their institutions cannot be overemphasized. Respondents are also of the view that a good relationship between the staff unions and the management creates harmonious environment for staff productivity. They also agree to the last statement in this subsection that government and the management recognizes the impact of academic and non-academic staff unions in the attainment of the polytechnic common goals.

Research Question 2: what is the relationship between management communication channels and performance of Federal Polytechnics in South-East, Nigeria?

The data for providing answers to the above research questions are presented on table 2 below.

Table 2: Mean scores of respondents' responses on the relationship between management communication channels and performance of Federal Polytechnics in South-East, Nigeria.

N=328

S/N	QUESTIONS	ΣFx	\bar{X}	Decision
6	Channels of communication from subordinates to superiors are usually followed without distortion by management	668	2.0	Disagree
7	Effective communication within organization enhances worker's performance.	1186	3.6	Agree
8	Circulars are sent to all units and departments to discuss vital issues concerning the smooth running of the institution	691	2.1	Disagree
9	Ideal communication can serve as a tool to improve morale and employee's satisfaction which in turn increases performance.	1056	3.2	Agree
10	The rector, from time to time, organizes for rector's address to communicate with the staff, his or her observations concerning the issue impeding the smooth running of the institution for better performance.	993	3.0	Agree
11	Your polytechnic has an effective channel of communication, which serve as the means of expressing, listening and understanding which gives way for effective dialogue.	985	3.0	Agree

Source: Field Survey, 2019

The second research question examines the relationship between management communication channels and performance of Federal Polytechnics in South-East, Nigeria. The data contained in table 2, are the mean scores of respondents' responses on the relationship between management communication channels and performance of Federal Polytechnics in South-East, Nigeria. They are six questions in all from number 6 to 11. Responding to the statements, respondents disagreed to the assertion in question 6 that channels of communication from subordinates to superiors are usually followed without distortion by management. They however, agree in questions 7 that effective communication within organization enhances worker's performance. This goes to show that the respondents appreciate the importance of effective communication in conflict resolution and organizational performance. However, in practice, respondents disagreed to the assertion in question item 8 that circulars are sent to all units and departments to discuss vital issues concerning the smooth running of the institution. This is a confirmation of the fact that channels of communication from subordinates to superiors are not usually followed without distortion by management. A further confirmation to the dichotomy between what is ideal and what is obtainable in practice is that while respondents agree in question items 9 that ideal communication can serve as a tool to improve morale and employee's satisfaction which in turn increases performance, they agree to the statement in question item 10 that the rector, from time to time, organizes for rector's address to communicate with the staff, his or her observations concerning the issue impeding the smooth running of the institution for better performance. They also agree that their institutions have effective channel of communication, which serve as the means of expressing, listening and understanding which gives way for effective dialogue. How these channels are being effectively exploited in the resolution of conflicts remains to be seen.

Test of Hypotheses

The hypotheses for this study were tested using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient. Data used for the test were obtained from the responses of respondents to various questions in the questionnaire item that relate to the various hypotheses. A 0.05 level of significance was adopted for the study

Hypotheses One

There is no significant relationship between the institution's trade unions and performance of Federal Polytechnics in South-East, Nigeria.

Table 3: Correlation between Trade Unions and Performance

Variables		Trade Unions	Performance
Trade Unions	Pearson Correlation	1	-.145**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.775
	N	328	328
Performance	Pearson Correlation	-.145**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.775	
	N	328	328

Results from the table indicate that the correlation coefficient (r) is -.145. This means that there is a negative relationship between trade unions and performance. Hence, since the probability value of .775 is greater than the level of significance which is 0.05, the null hypothesis is hereby accepted and the conclusion here is that there is no relationship between the institution's trade unions and performance of Federal Polytechnics in South-East, Nigeria.

Hypotheses Two

There is no significant relationship between management communication channels and performance of Federal Polytechnics in South-East, Nigeria.

Table 4: Correlation between Communication Channels and Performance

Variables		Communication Channels	Performance
Communication Channels	Pearson Correlation	1	.941**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	328	328
Performance	Pearson Correlation	.941**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	328	328

Results from the table 4 indicate that the correlation coefficient (r) is .941. This implies that there is a very strong relationship between communication and performance. Hence, since the probability value of .000 is less than the level of significance which is 0.05, the null hypothesis is hereby rejected and the alternative that there is a relationship between management communication channels and performance of Federal Polytechnics in South-East, Nigeria is accepted.

Discussion of the Findings

The goal in hypothesis one is to ascertain nature of relationship between institution's trade unions and performance of Federal Polytechnics in South-East, Nigeria. Result from the test of the second hypotheses reveal that there is no relationship between the institution's trade unions and performance of Federal Polytechnics in South-East, Nigeria. Also, second hypothesis is on the relationship between management communication channels and performance of Federal Polytechnics in South-East, Nigeria. Result from the test of these hypotheses reveals that there is positive relationship between management communication channels and performance of Federal Polytechnics in South-East, Nigeria. The finding reached from the test of this hypothesis agree with the study by Nebo, Nwankwo & Okonkwo (2015), where it was discovered that effective communication is the remedy to effective and efficient management performance of employees in an organization. It also agrees with the study by Ajike, Akinlabi, Magaji & Sonubi (2015) and Olukayode (2015) where it was discovered that conflict management impact positively on organizational performance and effective conflict management style reduces banking crisis in Nigeria.

6. CONCLUSION

No organization can succeed in an atmosphere of strife and conflict, even though conflict is inevitable in all forms of human interaction, the need to device measures to manage it is essential. Effective management of conflict situations will even lead to fostering greater unity, cooperation and harmonious work environment thereby improving performance. In most human interactions, people tend to bond better and understand one another better after a period of disagreement or crisis. It is on that basis that we proffer the following recommendations for the study.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Organisations should adopt effective conflict management measures to resolve conflict at its early stage. The government and all the stakeholders of the institution must be carried along in the formulation and implementation of policies that bother on wages and salaries, condition of service, funding of institutions etc. Also Labour unions on their part should see themselves as partners in progress and should not always be confrontational on issues affecting their welfare and working conditions.
2. Communication channels should be strengthened and expanded to ensure that all segments of the organization are covered in the communication process. Management of organisations should encourage suggestions and feedback to their policy decisions and actions.

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