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## **CONFLICT MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES AND INSTITUTIONAL EFFICIENCY IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN LAGOS STATE**

**S. A. SULE & A. A. ITA**

### **Abstract**

The aim of the study was to determine to what extent conflict management techniques used by educational managers and administrators in the universities influence institutional efficiency positively. The study area was Lagos State. Three hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. Inferential statistical method was used for the study and purposive sampling technique was used to sample 200 academic and non academic staff from the two public universities for the study. Data were collected by the use of the instrument titled "Conflict Management Techniques and Institutional Efficiency Questionnaire (CMTIEQ)". The instrument was a 4-point Likert type scale and consisted of 30 items. The reliability coefficient was 0.87, using the Cronbach Alpha reliability test. The hypotheses of the study were tested using the Chi-square test and Pearson Moment Product Correlation Statistics. The findings showed that conflict is inevitable in every organization, even in the institutions of higher learning like the Universities, and that it poses threats to institutional efficiency of Nigerian public Universities. Hence, the required and most appropriate techniques should be deployed by institutional managers to address conflicts in order to promote peace and increase performance and institutional efficiency. Premised on these findings, it was recommended that managers of tertiary institutions should pay more attention to conflict management in their various institutions and organisations by deploying the appropriate conflict management techniques to arrest conflicts as this will provide more opportunities for innovation and growth within the organisations.

**Keywords:** Conflict Management, Institutional Efficiency, Organization, University

### **Introduction**

The diversity in workplace and organizations makes it inevitable for the non-existence of conflict among organizational members. However, deploying effective management techniques for conflicts in organizations and educational institutions become imperative. Fatile & Adejuwon (2011) has instituted the fact that the contemporary world is increasingly multicultural and the identity crisis resulting

from this sometimes threatens sustainable human development. According to them, Conflict is an inevitable friction in any organization. Hence, effective management of conflicts is fundamental to the development of any society, but the prevailing situations in Nigeria constitute a reversal of this reality. Even with the existence of interpersonal relationships amongst organizational members especially in the workplace like the school, the presence and physical and non-physical availability of conflict cannot be overemphasized.

Ejiogu (1990) opined that no two individuals in any organization can behave exactly the same way all the time. According to him, each individual whether a pupil, teacher, parent, or administrator, is thus a unique person and within any organization such as the school, he is different from others in terms of role, status and authority. Conflicts will always occur but a well-managed conflict will not degenerate to violence. Since violence will not erupt without conflict as antecedents, one can assume that many of the conflicts in tertiary institutions and insecurity degenerated is because their antecedents (causes) were not properly managed or that the conflicting parties did not explore the power of communication and conflict manager's personality in resolving the crises (Agbonna; Yusuf & Onifade, 2009).

Conflict has been viewed differently by scholars and many researchers have also x-rayed both concepts of conflict and conflict management. Musti, Maina & Chris (2013), in their opinion averred that conflict management and resolution may have either positive or negative effect on organizational performance, depending on the nature of the conflict or how it is managed. In a related view, Armstrong (2009) stated that every organization has its optional level of conflict which is considered highly factual as it helps to generate an efficient institution. It has become a global saying that change is the only constant thing in the world. This makes it imperative for members of the educational environment to embrace change in all its ramifications and most importantly in the application of conflict management techniques in the workplace to resolve conflicts of all sorts when they arise in order to create an enabling working environment where only excellence and effective activities will strive, this in turn bring about an efficient institution. It is against this background that the researchers were motivated to investigate the influence of conflict management techniques and institutional efficiency in public tertiary institutions in Lagos State.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Every member of an educational organization, from the administrators/managers



(superiors) to the lower personnel (subordinate) is a crucial input of the system because they have the command of the knowledge and skills to bring about efficiency. Hence, the kind of environment in which they have to work to bring about this desired efficiency is pivotal and this determines to a great extent the level of organizational output or outcomes. Since conflict is as old as the existence of the human person, several people who have been mediators in time of conflicts have seen the need for certain methods, approaches, strategies and techniques to be put in place to salvage certain conflicts emergence in organizations in order to enhance quality and efficient organizations. However, despite many efforts and investment in conflict management, conflict in the workplace or any given organization or group of persons becomes inevitable and this becomes the reason why conflict has become a daily phenomenon in organizations. Some educational managers and administrators blame the existence of conflicts in their organizations on ineffective management and not paying attention to personnel ego, self-esteem, cultural and religious differences, social status, differences in ideologies and above all gossips and other unethical behaviours among personnel in the organization, while others attribute it to the poor attitude of personnel and poor work behaviours. Therefore, it becomes pertinent to pose the question "To what extent does conflict management techniques influence institutional efficiency in public universities in Lagos State?" This study seeks to provide answer to this question.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The aim of the study is to determine the extent to which conflict management techniques used by educational managers and administrators in the university influence institutional efficiency positively. Specifically, the purpose of the study is to find out the extent to which:-

1. Conflicts within the university system influence institutional efficiency
2. Conflict management techniques have influenced institutional efficiency in public universities
3. The relationship between conflict management and institutional efficiency

### **Hypotheses**

To guide the study, the following hypotheses were formulated.

1. There is no significant influence of Conflict on institutional efficiency of public Universities in Nigeria
2. The conflict management techniques adopted does not significantly influence the institutional efficiency of Nigerian public universities
3. There is no significant relationship between conflict management and

institutional efficiency.

## **Review of Literature**

It has been established that Conflict is an inevitable feature of organizational life and should be judged by its own performance. In the view of Imobigbe (1997), conflict is a condition of disharmony or hostility within an interaction process which is usually the direct result of clash of interests by the parties involved. However, Robins (1998) believes that conflict is a positive force and necessary for effective performance. Krisburg (1973) views conflict as a relationship between two or more parties who believe they have incompatible goals. Conflict is considered as all kinds of opposition or antagonistic interaction including disagreements or controversies about ideas, values and ways of life (Ejiogu, 1990). The degree to which conflicts occur between individuals and groups within organizational place can be attributed to the differences in ideologies of the individuals and or groups within the workplace or organization. This in a way has influence on the cohabitation of individuals within these organizations. Conflict means the link of disagreement and disparity between individuals with differences in social status, ideology and belief. Simons & Peterson (2002) contends that conflict emanates when two or more values perspectives are aligned or agreed about. This according to them may include conflict within oneself, as in when one is not living consonance with his values or world view, when these values or world views are threatened by others or it might simply be a 'discomfort from fear of the unknown or from lack of fulfilment.

This assertion has been perceived differently by Fatile & Adejuwon (2011) who in their studies indicated that no meaningful development can take place in a crisis ridden system torn apart by crisis as witnessed in the educational institutions in the country today. Wilmot and Hocket (1998) assert that conflict is an expressed struggle between at least two interdependent parties who perceived incompatible goals, scarce resource, and interference from other in achieving their goals. Musti et al (2013) in their opinion agree with Wilmot & Hocket as to them conflict is certainly an intrinsic and inevitable part of human existence. According to them, it is an upshot of the pursuit of incompatible interest and goals by different groups, culminating in a resort to the use of force and violence in the pursuit of incompatible and particular interest and goals.

The concept of conflict has been perceived in a number of ways by many scholars. March and Simon (1958) said the term is applied to a breakdown in the standard mechanisms of decision-making so that an individual or group experiences difficulty



In selecting an action alternative. Conflict is also seen as emanating from the tugs and pulls of different distribution of resources, and access to power and right to human personality (Musti et al, 2013). In another light, Glueck (1980) perceived conflict as a kind of problem which can develop within or between groups. In view of the assertions made by researchers and scholars, conflict can be conceptualised as tension between two or more social entities which arises from incompatibility of actual or desired responses. Thus, it can most readily be seen that conflict stems from incompatibility in goals with its functional and dysfunctional dimension (Coser, 1956).

Efficiency is considered the internal operation of an organization relating to avoidance of wastages through judicious utilization of available resources within the organization at a given time. Succinctly, proper management of conflicts in the universities could help to reduce the level of disharmony and discord which, in turn, could help the universities achieve their goals efficiently. But the presence of disharmony and internal squabbles, infighting as well as differences among members of staff of public universities have been identified as factors militating against institutional efficiency, and invariably effective management. Institutional efficiency is a measure of how well an organization uses its personnel and organizational members to deliver and manage its development programmes. Universities oversight and support (O&S) functions, as well as its management of results, people and budgetary resources are also determinants of institutional efficiency. These feats can be achievable in an organization that is conflict free or minimal conflict existence.

Organizational members' commitment to conflict management by deploying the various conflict management techniques in the day to day activities of the school organization has been demonstrated in the harmonious, peaceful and stabilized educational atmosphere within the tertiary institutions of learning in recent times, specifically the public citadels of learning in Lagos State. According to Murthy (2006), if conflict is well managed, it improves innovation and creativity. This implies that there is need for the existence of a conflict free work environment which would drive efficiency and create positive work values among organizational members. This aligns with the position of Beadwell and Claydon (2007) that innovation and change may become unmanageable and the organization may not adopt to change in its environment. This approach encourages a minimum level of conflict within the group in order to encourage self-criticism, change and innovation and to help prevent apathy or too great tolerance for harmony and the status quo.

Conflict can be managed in different ways, some focusing on interpersonal relationships and others on structural changes. Robinson; Roy & Clifford, (1974) advocates that managing conflict toward constructive action is the best approach in resolving conflict in organization. Efficient and effective management of conflicts is fundamental to the development of any society, but the prevailing situations in Nigeria constitute a reversal of this reality. Many Nigerian schools - higher or lower levels of school have been experiencing organizational conflicts and insecurity that in most cases hinder them from achieving the purpose for which they were established (Fatile & Adejuwon, 2011).

Agbonna; Yusuf & Onifade, 2009, have pointed that schools cannot avoid experiencing one conflict or the other but a great deal of such conflict can be managed and be guided from disrupting school efforts towards attaining its manifest and latent goals if the conflicting parties are systematic in the way they communicate their grievances, situation of the conflict and their readiness to negotiate for peace and if the negotiator mediating the resolution process is of good personality. When conflict arises, there is every need to be able to manage them properly, so that it becomes a positive force, rather than a negative one, which would threaten the individual or group. Parker (1974) argued that if conflicts arise and are not managed properly, it will lead to delays of work, disinterest and lack of action and in extreme cases, it might lead to complete breakdown of the group. Unmanaged conflict may result in withdrawal of individuals and unwillingness on their part to participate in other groups or assist with various group action programmes in the organization.

### **Research Methodology**

The design adopted for the study was a descriptive survey research design. The design was appropriate for the study because the researchers were interested in finding out the influence of Conflict Management Techniques on Institutional Efficiency with the view of establishing the relationship between the two variables.

The population of the study consisted of both academic and non academic staff of public Universities in Lagos State. Purposive sampling technique was used to sample 100 academic and non-academic staff of the University of Lagos and 100 academic and non-academic staff of the Lagos State University in the study area. This gave a total sample of 200 respondents. The instrument for data collection was a questionnaire designed by the researchers and titled "Conflict Management Techniques and Institutional Efficiency Questionnaire (CMTIEQ)." The instrument consisted of two sections. Section A consists of items that sought personal and



demographic data from the respondents such as gender, age, working experiences, qualification etc. Section B was a 4-point Likert type scale which comprised 30 items. Each item had four response options ranging from Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A) to Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD). The respondents were required to tick one of the 4 options against an item to indicate the extent of their agreement or disagreement with the items. The instrument was administered on the respondents in their institutions with the help of two research assistants. All the 200 copies of the questionnaire administered were correctly filled and returned.

In the 4-point Likert scale, all positively worded items were scored 4 points for Strongly Agree, 3 points for Agree, 2 points for Disagree and 1 point for Strongly Disagree, while for negatively worded items, the scoring technique was reversed. There were three hypotheses formulated for the study. All data collected for testing the hypotheses were analyzed using Chi-square test and Pearson Moment Product Correlation Statistics.

### Results

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant influence of Conflict on Institutional Efficiency of public Universities in Nigeria.

**Table 1**  
**Analysis of influence of Conflict on Institutional Efficiency of Public Universities in Nigeria**

Variable	$\chi^2$	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Degrees of freedom	p-value
Conflict	136.667	200	3.024	44476	3	0.0000
Institutional Efficiency						

*Chi-square (2) is significant at  $P < 0.5$*

The result from table 1 indicates that Chi-square test (2) = 136.667 is significant at  $p > 0.05$  given 3 degree of freedom. Thus the null hypothesis that states that there is no significant influence of Conflict on institutional efficiency of public Universities in Nigeria was rejected while the alternate hypothesis retained. This result implies that conflict has serious effect on the institutional efficiency of Nigerian public universities.

Hypothesis 2: The conflict management technique adopted does not significantly

influence the institutional efficiency of Nigerian public universities

**Table 2**  
**Influence of Conflict Management Techniques Adopted on Institutional Efficiency of Public Universities in Nigeria**

Variable	$\chi^2$	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Degrees of freedom	p-value
Conflict Mgt Technique	136.667	200	29.024	.3457	3	0.0000
Institutional Efficiency						

*Chi-square (2) is significant at  $P < 0.5$*

The result from table 2 indicates that Chi-square test (2) = 126.637 is significant at  $p > 0.05$  given 3 degree of freedom. Thus the null hypothesis that states that there is no significant influence of Conflict management techniques adopted on institutional efficiency of public Universities in Nigeria was rejected while the alternate hypothesis retained. This result implies that the type of conflict management techniques adopted within the school organization plays a pivotal role in institutional efficiency in Nigerian public universities.

Hypothesis 3: There is no significant relationship between conflict management and institutional efficiency

**Table 3**  
**Analysis of conflict management and institutional efficiency**

Variable	N	Mean	SD	r-cal	p-value
Conflict management	200	2.184	0.4863		
				0.470	0.000
Institutional efficiency	200	2.548	0.1088		

*Correlation (r) is significant at  $P < 0.5$*

The result from table 3 above shows a significant relationship between conflict management and institutional efficiency. This was based on the result of analysis which produced a calculated r value of 0.470\* at  $p > 0.05$ , thus the null hypothesis that



states that there is no significant relationship between conflict management and institutional efficiency was rejected. This result implies that the extent of conflict management will determine the institutional efficiency of the public universities all things being equal.

### **Discussion of Findings**

One of the major findings of the study has revealed that conflict has serious effect on the institutional efficiency of Nigerian public universities. This is because conflict is inevitable where two or more persons have to interact for a long time (Ejiogu, 2001). However, Armstrong (2009) concludes that institutional performance depends on either positive or negative nature of conflict and how well head teachers and administrators are able to handle it. According to him, in every organization particularly educational, this helps to increase output. This shows that institutional efficiency can be achieved only if conflicts within the institutions are well managed. Research by Ford, 2007 has revealed that task related conflict could be beneficial to the institution when ideas are exchanged amongst group members. This in a nutshell shows that though conflict is inevitable in every organization where people of diverse backgrounds are brought together to achieve a common goal (organizational goal), the various degrees of conflict that exist in such organizations can contribute to or mar institutional efficiency. This solely depends on the way and manner that such conflicts are managed. therefore, effective conflict management is pivotal.

Another finding of this study shows that the different techniques applied in conflict management is also of great importance. As already established, every institution is inevitably confronted with one type and level of conflict or the other. Still, the benefits of conflict management should not be underestimated. This is so because conflict which is managed effectively and appropriately using the required techniques would add substantial values to an organization. A research by Bric e and Schuler (2004) indicated appropriate guidelines for turning dysfunctional conflicts into functional conflicts. They indicated also that many institutions use win-lose nature and competitive approach to curb conflict. Mohamed & Raman (2011) in their findings also affirmed that conflict need to be managed appropriately and efficiently would act as a catalyst for change. According to them, this type of change will lead to a conducive environment in the workplace whereby over a period of time it will result in high productivity.

The study also revealed that the extent of conflict management will determine the institutional efficiency of the public universities all things being equal. This is in agreement with the findings of Dowling, et al (2008) which revealed that top level managers see group conflict as unfortunate and therefore resolve or entirely

eliminate all types of disputes. According to them, these top-level managers have come to accept that conflict actually disorganize activities within an institution thereby preventing optimal performance. Obisi (2003) has also opined that conflict should always be settled at the lowest level. He said that one of the key techniques in conflict management is the individuals' willingness to settle whatever differences he or she has. Obisi further stated that this can be done by the concerned first raising the issue with his or her immediate supervisor. However, whatever type of conflict exist within an organization, it needs to be effectively managed before it becomes a destructive force in the organization (Bloombury, 2002).

## **Conclusion**

Conflict from the forgoing discussion has been seen as being prevalent in both human society and human organization. Since human beings are involved in the process of conflict in the organization, there should be a better understanding of each other, the management, managers, employees should see one another as human beings and as such treat themselves alike. This is a way of averting conflict within the institution in order to improve performance among organizational members as well increase institutional efficiency. Also since conflict is seen as normal either positively or negatively within the organization, it should not be avoided by organizations rather, it should be confronted. Conflicts within the organization should be managed and deliberate efforts and techniques should be deployed at every given time to manage in the early stage as this will not stall institutional growth but will increase it efficiency.

## **Recommendations**

In the light of the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made.

1. Managers and administrators should pay more attention to conflict management in their various institutions and organizations by deploying the appropriate conflict management techniques to arrest conflicts as this will provide more opportunities for innovation and growth within the organization.
2. Teamwork should be encouraged more in the organization in order to create room for inter-personal and workplace relationship. This will make organizational members see each other important and treat them as such. Also where conflict arises, the managers should step in and react promptly for the purpose of avoidance or quick resolution.
3. The superiors in various organizations should lay down proper guidelines of conflict resolution. Whenever there is conflict, the parties concerned should know who to report to and what steps are laid down necessary to settle such dispute or conflict. Also members of the organization must respect each



other's views, opinions and decision at certain points. There should be some level of dynamism in their operations.

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