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RELATIONSHIP PERCEIVED STRATEGIES FOR EFFECTIVE CONFLICT MANAGEMENT BY BUSINESS EDUCATION STAFF IN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigated perceived strategies for effective conflict management by business education staff in public tertiary institutions in Anambra State, Nigeria. Five research questions guided the study. The study employed descriptive survey design and 169 business education staff constituted the population of the study. A structured questionnaire was used to elicit information from the respondents. The reliability of the instrument was tested using Cronbach Alpha and it yielded a value of 0.81 meaning that the instrument is valid. The data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation with SPSS version 25. The mean rating used to analyze the data was interpreted in relation to real limit of number. The study revealed that conflict management strategies (competition, avoidance, collaboration, compromising and accommodation) were perceived to be effective for conflict management in public tertiary institutions. Also, a large number of employees perceived compromising and collaboration as effective conflict management strategies more than every other strategy. It was recommended that educational managers should understand the conflict and apply suitable strategy with the view to achieving positive result, thereby enhancing productivity and job satisfaction. Also, educational managers should encourage compromising and collaboration strategy in resolving conflict in the tertiary institutions in Anambra State to maintain healthy relationships.

Keywords: Strategies, Conflict Management, Business Education Staff, Public Tertiary Institutions

Introduction

Organization is made up of different individual coming from cultural diversity. They have different ways of life, understanding and belief. These differences tend to conflict each other as individuals, groups carry out day-to-day activities. Conflict, according to Adeyemi and Ademilua (2012), is described as all forms of opposition, disagreement, friction between two or more parties and it manifests in the forms of arguments, protests, demonstration, aggression and other destructive behaviours. Evuarherhe and Olatunde (2016) assert that conflict is inevitable among individuals and in organizations because of the nature of human beings who differ in value orientation, attitudes and levels of understanding. Conflict is a natural disagreement resulting from individuals or groups that differ in attitudes, belief, values and needs. It can also originate from past rivalries and personality differences, (Hoban in Saikiyo & Mohammed, 2016).

Similarly, Armstrong (2009) views conflict as inevitable in workplace, because they function by means of adjustments and compromises among competitive elements in their structure and membership. He further opines that conflict arises when there is a change which could be seen as a threat to be challenged or resisted, or when there is frustration. However, conflict is not to be deplored, it could bring about progress and change and should be used constructively. In support, Kodikal, Rahiman and Pakeerrappa (2014)

assert that when conflicts are kept within tolerable limits, can be a source of creativity and performance enhancement, however, becomes destructive when these limits are exceeded. Kodikal et. al. buttressed that an optimum level of conflict needs to be maintained in tertiary institution to prevent stagnation, stimulate creativity, allow release of tension and initiate the seeds of change and rejuvenation, yet not so much as to be disruptive or deter coordination of activities. Like organizations, tertiary institutions are not immune from conflict. This is because where two or more people co-exist, conflict is anticipated.

In tertiary institutions, staff members (both Academic and non-Academic) are employed and placed in different departments. They come together to interact in a given manner in order to achieve set goals guiding these departments, as well as to satisfy their individual needs and desires. These staff members, obviously, demonstrate varying degrees of abilities, competencies and aptitudes as they are from different social backgrounds which make them differ from one another; thus, disagreement over issues such as interest, opinions, views are inevitable (Omene, 2021). Tertiary institution in Anambra state handles different programmes of which business education programme is one of it.

The internal behaviour seen in business education programme constitutes a very complex organism shaped by many hands (Fareo & Jajua; 2018). This implies that internally, the system is shaped by many logic, habit and dynamics. It is also influenced by various challenges, constraints and pressure from the outer environment. Fareo and Jajua further stressed that the combinations of external and internal pressures found within business education programme made administration very difficult and complex, therefore, conflict is inevitable. Conflict can arise as a result of differences in goals or plans for allocation of resources, assigning of responsibilities, course allocations, time table allocations, supervision allocation, breaches of formal and informal contracts, misinterpretation or inconsistent application of regulations, power struggles and personal antagonisms. These sources of conflict bring about distrust, hostility among professionals and academics, thus contributing in hampering smooth, effective and efficient administration in business education programme in tertiary institutions.

Conflict could be inherently bad or good, functional or dysfunctional. However, conflict occurrence has been observed to be inevitable and ubiquitous in human workplace, the strategies for managing it have remained topical issues and matters of concern to individuals, groups and scholars. Adeyemi (2012) found that in the Nigerian school system, conflict occurs from time to time. He argues that conflict is the art of coming into collision, clash or be in opposition with one another. Since conflict is inevitable especially in tertiary institutions, it becomes imperative to manage, mitigate its negative effects in the workplace.

Ukata and Silas-Dikibo (2020) averred that conflict management is the practice of being able to identify and handle conflicts sensibly, fairly and efficiently. Furthermore, Ukata and Silas-Dikibo explained that conflict in a business are natural part of the workplace, it is important that there are people who understand conflict and know how to resolve them. Conflict management could also be viewed as recognizing the potential value of conflict for driving change and innovation. This means knowing when to confront, and when to avoid a conflict and understanding the issues around which conflict revolve. It means looking for those win/win solutions and seeking agreement on a solution while eliciting commitment to making it work effectively in points.

Conflict management strategies refer to the internal mechanisms used by the various authorities in resolving conflict. Adeyemi and Ademilua (2012) see conflict management strategies as the internal mechanisms used by the various authorities in resolving conflict. These strategies as listed by Tosi, Rizzo, and Carroll (2010) include competition, collaboration, avoidance and

compromise. Competition involves an individual putting his or her own interest before anyone else's interest, meaning "I win, you lose". Collaboration is a strategy where people collectively seek for a common solution to a problem, that is "I win, you win" while avoidance which is "no winner no looser" is a method of conflict management which simply means to withdraw. It is a decision to do nothing. It is also a situation where the conflicting parties resolve themselves without personal confrontation. Compromise is seen as a give and take proposition where parties concerned do not struggle with problems to the fullest, meaning "you bend I bend". Boyd, Maguire and Sanders as cited in Sakiyo and Mohammed (2016) included accommodation or smoothing as one of the strategies for managing conflict. This strategy means low concern for self and high concern for others that is "I win, you lose". Conflict, is therefore necessary in institutions bringing about change and making life more interesting and meaningful (Ebuara, 2016). In view of this, conflict should not be suppressed but to be managed so as to minimize its dysfunctional effects and maximize its functional effects. Too much conflict creates dysfunctional interaction within a group because they undermine group performance.

Several studies on conflict management were carried out in the past; for instance, Sakiyo and Mohammed (2016) investigated staff perception on conflict management strategies in tertiary institutions of Adamawa state identifying integrating, compromising, smoothing, competing and avoiding as conflict management strategies. Adeyemi and Ademilua (2012) also investigated on conflict management strategies and administrative effectiveness in Nigerian Universities; dialogue, force, emergency, avoidance, negligence, mediation, prevention, participatory decision making are strategies considered for conflict management. Furthermore, the study conducted by Yusuf and Ibrahim (2019) examined conflict management strategies and administrative effectiveness; identifying dialogue, competition, prevention and communication as conflict management strategies. More so, Abioro, Odunlami and Ekpudu (2019) determined conflict management strategies for industrial harmony; identifying collective bargaining, confrontation and avoidance as conflict management strategies. From the literature reviewed, there appears no empirical evidence identifying conflict management strategies as it affects business education staff in tertiary institutions. Hence, the study, therefore, aimed at determining the strategies perceived for effective conflict management by business education staff in public tertiary institutions in Anambra State, Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Conflict is inevitable given the wide range of goals existing in educational institutions. There is no denial that tertiary institutions have, at one time or the other experienced both internal and external conflicts. The researcher observed that Business education department in public tertiary institutions are not left out in experiencing conflict. These conflicts, no doubt, have toll on the work effectiveness of business education staff lending to low morale, inaction, frustration, lack of commitment, lack of effective communication, role ambiguity, staff misusing their power, negligence of duties, insolence behaviour, autocracy and low productivity. Obi and Enyi as cited by Ikemeh (2016), noted that conflict engenders hostility and hinders departments' effectiveness. It is therefore, compelling that certain strategies be adopted to effectively manage conflicts among business education staff for optimal result and efficiency. This and many more reasons prompted this researcher to determine strategies considered effective for conflict management by business education staff in public tertiary institutions in Anambra State.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study.

1. To what extent do staff of business education in Anambra State consider competition as a

strategy for effective management of conflict in public tertiary institutions?

2. To what extent do staff of business education in Anambra State consider avoidance as a strategy for effective management of conflict in public tertiary institutions?
3. To what extent do staff of business education in Anambra State consider collaboration as a strategy for effective management of conflict in public tertiary institutions?
4. To what extent do staff of business education in Anambra State consider compromise as a strategy for effective management of conflict in public tertiary institutions?
5. To what extent do staff of business education in Anambra State consider accommodation as a strategy for effective management of conflict in public tertiary institutions?

Research Method

Descriptive survey research design was adopted in this study. This design according to Nworgu (2015), is one in which group of people or items are studied by collecting and analyzing data from only a few people or items considered being a representative of the entire group. The study was conducted using public tertiary institutions in Anambra State that offer business education programme. The population of this study consists of 169 business education staff in the four public tertiary institutions in Anambra. This comprised 115 academic staff and 54 non-academic staff. The population was considered because the researcher is a staff in one of the departments offering business education programme and have witnessed kinds of conflict arose among staff and its effect on the work performance of business education staff. A structured questionnaire consisting of 25 items structure on a five-point Likert scale was used to elicit information from the respondents on strategies considered effective for conflict management in public tertiary institutions in Anambra State. The questionnaire was subjected to face and content validity by three experts, one from Technology and Vocational Education department, one from Management and Policy education department and one from Measurement and Evaluation department, all from Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The internal consistency of the questionnaire was ascertained using Cronbach Alpha reliability formula which yielded the value of 0.76, 0.73, 0.86, 0.89 and 0.80 respectively with total value of 0.81. Out of 169 copies of questionnaire distributed, 143 were retrieved and used for the analysis. Mean and standard deviation were used for the analysis with SPSS version 25. The mean rating used to analyze the data was interpreted in relation to real limit of number. They include 4.5 - 5.0 very great extent, 3.5 - 4.49 great extent, 2.5 - 3.49 moderate extent, 1.5 - 2.49 small extent, 1.00 - 1.49 very small extent respectively.

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Presentation of Results

Research Question 1: To what extent do staff of business education in Anambra State perceived competition as a strategy for effective management of conflict in public tertiary institutions?

Table 1: Respondents' mean ratings on the extent competition strategy is perceived effective for conflict management

S/N	Competition Strategy	$\bar{X}$	SD	Remark
1.	Parties to see conflicts as Win or Lose issue	3.62	1.28	Great Extent
2.	Imposing personal decisions on both parties	2.68	1.40	Moderately Extent
3.	Permit each party to suggest satisfactory solution	4.29	.84	Great Extent
4.	Meting out punitive measures to any party	3.92	1.04	Great Extent
5.	Permitting each party to attain excellent result	3.77	1.19	Great Extent
	Grand mean	3.66	1.15	**Great Extent**

The results in Table 1 show that the mean score of items 1, 3, 4, 5 fell within the real limit of 3.5-4.49 meaning they were of great extent while item 2 fell within the real limit of 2.5-3.49 meaning moderate extent. The grand mean of 3.66 indicates that on the whole, the respondents perceived competition strategy to a great extent for effective conflict management in public tertiary institutions in Anambra State.

Research Question 2: To what extent do staff of business education in Anambra State perceived avoidance as a strategy for effective management of conflict in public tertiary institutions?

Table 2: Respondents' mean ratings on the extent avoidance strategy is perceived effective for conflict management

S/N	Avoidance Strategy	$\bar{X}$	SD	Remark
6.	Discouraging staff from unnecessary argument	4.14	1.29	Great Extent
7.	Giving in to staff demands and ignoring one's own goal	2.86	1.24	Moderate Extent
8.	Discouraging issues that lead to disagreement	4.13	1.01	Great Extent
9.	Playing down disputing issues	3.28	1.34	Moderate Extent
10	Encouraging each party to back out when there is conflict	3.53	1.46	Great Extent
	Grand Mean	3.59	1.27	**Great Extent**

The results in Table 2 show that the mean score of items 6, 8, 10 fell within the real limit of 3.5 - 4.49 meaning they were of great extent while item 7, 9 fell within the real limit of 2.5 - 3.49 meaning moderate extent. The grand mean of 3.59 indicates that on the whole, the respondents perceived avoidance strategy to a great extent for effective conflict management in public tertiary institutions in Anambra State. The standard deviation ranging from 1.01 – 1.46 indicating homogeneity of the respondents.

Research Question 3: To what extent do staff of business education in Anambra State perceived collaboration as a strategy for effective

management of conflict in public tertiary institutions?

Table 3: Respondents' mean ratings on the extent collaboration strategy is perceived effective for conflict management.

S/N	Collaboration Strategy	$\bar{X}$	SD	Remark
11	Encouraging both parties involved to invest their time	4.32	.84	Great Extent
12	Emphasizing on views to finding amicable solutions	4.12	.88	Great Extent
13	Making parties see conflict as creative opportunity	3.48	1.22	Moderate Extent
14	Setting grievances by bringing up similar ideas that have similarities	4.08	.94	Great Extent
15	Exchanging information with each party	4.19	.85	Great Extent
	Grand Mean	4.04	0.95	**Great Extent**

The data presented in Table 3 indicated the extent staff of business education perceived collaboration as a strategy for conflict management. Item 11, 12, 14 and 15 show that the respondents agreed to a great extent while item 13 agreed to a moderate extent. The grand mean of 4.04 indicates that the respondents perceived to a great extent that collaboration is an effective strategy for conflict management. The standard deviations showed homogeneity of the respondents.

Research Question 4: To what extent do staff of business education in Anambra State perceived compromise as a strategy for effective management of conflict in public tertiary institutions?

Table 4: Respondents' mean ratings on the extent compromise as a strategy is perceived effective for conflict management.

S/N	Compromising strategy	$\bar{X}$	SD	Remarks
16	Encouraging all parties to admit blames	3.96	1.06	Great Extent
17	Seeking negotiations to reach a compromise	4.26	.93	Great Extent
18	Making slight modifications in goals to meet staff needs	3.72	1.00	Great Extent
19	Encouraging each party to adjust their interest	4.10	.90	Great Extent
20	Looking for a fair solution in a conflict situation	4.24	.85	Great Extent
	Grand mean	4.06	0.95	**Great Extent**

The item by item analysis in Table 4 shows that all the items achieved mean scores ranging from 3.72 - 4.26 while the standard deviation scores show figures from 0.85 – 1.06. The grand mean score of 4.06 indicates that on the whole, the respondents perceived compromising strategy to a great extent for effective conflict management.

The standard deviations showed homogeneity of the respondents.

Research Question 5: To what extent do staff of business education in Anambra State perceived accommodation as a strategy for effective management of conflict in public tertiary institutions?

Table 5: Respondents' mean ratings on the extent accommodation strategy is perceived effective for conflict management

S/N	Accommodation Strategy	X	SD	Remarks
21	Preferring others' interest above one's interest	2.99	1.34	Moderate Extent
22	Accepting opponents' interest for peaceful co-existence	3.38	1.26	Moderate Extent
23	Emphasizing areas of common interest of differences to quarrelling parties	3.87	1.06	Great Extent
24	Cultivating habit of self-sacrifice to the needs of others	4.07	.93	Great Extent
25	Considering an issue rationally in place of personal goals	3.94	1.00	Great Extent
	Grand mean	3.65	1.12	**Great Extent**

Table 5 shows that the mean score of items 23, 24 and 25 fell within the real limit of 3.5-4.49 meaning they were of great extent while items 21 and 22 fell within the real limit of 2.5 - 3.49 meaning moderate extent. The grand mean of 3.65 indicates that on the whole, the respondents perceived accommodation strategy to a great extent for effective conflict management in public tertiary institutions in Anambra State. The standard deviation ranging from 0.93 – 1.34 revealed homogeneity of the respondents.

Discussion of Findings

The findings show that business education staff in public tertiary institutions in Anambra State perceived competition strategy as effective conflict management to a great extent. This finding is in agreement with Yusuf and Ibrahim (2019), who found that competition strategy for conflict management enhance administrative effectiveness. The authors proposed that educational managers should try as much as possible to place individual employees or groups in competitive stimuli to spark competition, thereby making each participant to voluntarily work hard to win. Educational manager can as well establish contests, incentive plans or bonus to encourage competition.

The findings also revealed that business education staff perceived avoidance strategy for effective conflict management to a great extent, which corroborate with the conclusion of Kodikal, Rahiman and Pakeerrappa (2014), that many of the respondents are resorting to 'avoidance mode' where again prudence has to be taken by the organizations, because anti-conflict cultures have been tolerable in the past but not in today's fiercely competitive global economy.

Furthermore, the findings indicated that staff of business education in public tertiary institutions in Anambra State perceived collaboration strategy for effective conflict management to a great extent. This study aligns with the submission of Wobodo (2019) that collaboration preserve existing harmonious relationship within the parties concerned. The author also observed that collaboration strategy is a dominant tool used within the organization to solve problem.

In addition, the findings revealed staff of business education in public tertiary institutions in Anambra State perceived compromising strategy as effective for conflict management to a great extent. This finding supports the finding of Bamson and Zeb-Obipi (2019) that there exists positive and significant association between compromise and goal focus. This simply means that employees exhibit the behavior of giving up some of their demands after much disagreement with other members of staff to reach an agreement on how to remain goal focused in achieving organizational objectives.

Finally, the findings also show that accommodation strategy was perceived as effective for management of conflict to a great extent by business education staff in public tertiary institutions in Anambra State. This finding is in agreement with Akintokunbo (2018) study, which revealed that accommodation strategy is a strong dimension of conflict management that positively and significantly relate with organizational effectiveness (productivity and survival); implying that improvement in accommodating strategy directly affect organizational effectiveness in the studied firms. In addition, Wobodo (2019) averred that accommodation creates a lose/win relationship where accommodating party may make a choice to concede to the needs of the other party, sometimes out of kindness and sometimes to avoid stress.

Conclusion

On the basis of the analysis and results of this study, it was concluded that conflict management strategies (competition, avoidance, collaboration, compromising and accommodation) were perceived to be effective for conflict management in public tertiary institutions to great extent. A large number of employees perceived compromising and collaboration more than every other strategy. This implies that in resolving conflict, maintenance of relationship is very important. Conflict is inevitable and should not be downplayed because its effective handling can foster positive change, as well as encouraging creativity and innovation. It can also awaken the consciousness among group members.

Recommendations

1. Educational managers should understand the conflict and apply suitable strategy with the view to achieve positive result thereby, enhancing productivity and job satisfaction.
2. Educational managers should encourage compromising and collaboration strategy in resolving conflict in the tertiary institutions in Anambra State to maintain healthy relationships.

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