Assessment of Conflict Management in an Organization: A Study of University of Abuja

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Abstract: *This paper is on "assessment of conflict management in the University of Abuja". The objective is to examine the management of organizational conflict in the University of Abuja and how it affects the performance of students of the University. In order to achieve this, the paper employed both primary data and secondary data, the researchers adopt a survey research design and simple random sampling technique, the data collected were analysed using simple percentages. Chi-square was used to test the formulated hypothesis, concluded and recommended that Organizational conflict in the University of Abuja is the major cause of poor performance of students since 2011 to 2015. Organizational conflict in University of Abuja often impedes the academic development of students and promotion of lecturers; management should provide a good learning environment for its students so as to produce well-trained graduates. A committee that would look into matters of the University in order to avoid future conflict and bring about culture of dialogue between conflicting parties should be set up; and management should be more democratic in handling student and staff affairs in decision making process that involve them.*

Keywords: Group, Management, Organizational Conflict, Student

1. Introduction

Conflict may be seen as a struggle or contest between people with opposing needs, ideas, beliefs, values, or goals (Laurie .J.M 2005). Conflict in teams is inevitable; however, the results of conflict are not predetermined. Conflict might escalate and lead to non-productive results or conflict can be beneficially resolved and lead to quality final products. Therefore, learning to manage conflict is integral to a high performance team. Although very few people go looking for conflict more often than not, conflict results because of miscommunication between people with regard to their needs, ideas, beliefs, goals, or values. Conflict management is the principle that all conflict cannot necessarily be resolved, but learning how to manage conflict can decrease the odds of non-productive escalation. Conflict management involves acquiring skills related to conflict resolution, self-awareness about conflict modes, conflict communication skills, and establishing a structure for management of conflict in the institution.

Conflicts are inevitable in any organization (Armstrong Michael, 2005). This is more-so in an originisation as a university with a structure that allows two or more units or groups to share functional boundaries in achieving set objectives. The students' are perhaps the most complex of all. As a heterogeneous group, they have conflict within each other, yet they have to conform to learning certain things in order to acquire a degree. In contrast, there is the burning desire of the "angry" late adolescents not only to belong to the world, but to reform it. This desire leads to a fierce challenge of accepted practices. It then becomes necessary to examine the resultant effects of conflicts on the attainment of the goals of university education, conflicts usually result into activities such as disruption of university programmes leading to elongated university calendars, boycott of lecturers, loss of lives and properties and closing down of institutions. These activities have translated into the truncated academic programmes leading to elongated university calendar. It should be noted, however, that conflicts have some positive role to play in an organization most especially in sensitizing groups to the needs and aspirations of others. Prompt responses to such sensitivity often prevent the damaging effects of conflicts.

The study would examine the intent, and manifest the management of organizational conflict in the University of Abuja. It would provide an objective view of the nature of organizational conflict in the University of Abuja from 2010 to 2015, with a view to suggesting effective ways of managing conflicts in the institution. It will also help the University to identify ways of managing organizational conflicts.

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1.1 Objective of the study

The main objective of this study is to examine the management of organizational conflict in the University of Abuja as to how it affects the performance of students, lecturers and management of the University of Abuja. The study wishes to draw conclusion and make recommendations in the light of the findings.

1.2 Hypothesis

The hypothesis to be tested in the course of the study are stated below
Ho: Organizational conflict in the University of Abuja is not the major cause of poor performance of students since 2011 to 2015

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework
2.1 Concept of Conflict

The term "conflict" has no single clear meaning. Much of the confusion has been created by scholars in different disciplines who are interested in studying conflict. Systematic reviews of the conflict literature of Fink (1968), Tedeschi, Schelenker, and Bonoma (1973), and Thomas (1976, 1992) show a conceptual sympathy for, but little consensual endorsement of any generally accepted definition of conflict. Fink (1968), in his classic review, has illustrated tremendous various conflict definitions. He discovered a range of definitions for specific interests and a variety of general definitions that attempt to be all-inclusive.

In the organizational area, Fenn, P. (2012) considers conflict as a breakdown in the standard mechanisms of decision making, so that an individual or group experiences difficulty in selecting an alternative. This is a narrow conceptualization of conflict and is not very useful for research purposes. On the broad side, Pondy (1964) has argued that conflict can best be understood as a dynamic process underlying organizational behavior. This is a very broad definition that very little of anything transpiring in a group or individual. Harold Koontz: et al (2008) takes a middle position, defining conflict as "an interactive state in which the behaviours or goals of one actor are to some degree incompatible with the behaviours or goals of some other actor or actors". It is understood from exposition that "actor" refers to any social entity, from the individual to the corporate body itself. Smith (1966) also takes a similar position and defines conflict as "a situation in which the conditions, practices, or goals for the different participants are inherently incompatible". Another definition of conflict is "a type of behaviour which occurs when two or more parties are in opposition or in battle as a result of a perceived relative deprivation from the activities of or interacting with another person or group (Gallo, G. 2013)". The difference between the last two authors in defining conflict is that whereas Smith considers conflict as a situation, Litterer considers it as a type of behaviour. However, both of these authors and Tedeschi *et al* consider conflict to result from incompatibility or opposition in goals, activities, or interaction among the social entities.

2.2 Levels of analysis

Organizational conflict according to Yasufu, T.M (1980) is classified as intra-organizational (i.e. conflict within an organization) or inter-organizational (i.e. conflict between two or more organizations). Intra-organizational conflict may also be classified on the basis of levels (individual, group etc) at which it occurs. On this basis intra-organizational conflict may be classified as intrapersonal- It occurs when an organizational member is required to perform certain tasks and roles that do not match his or her expertise, interest, goals and values; interpersonal- It refers to conflict between two or more organizational members of the same or different hierarchical levels or units; intra group- conflict may also occur as a result of incompatibilities or disagreements between some or all the members of a group and its leaders; and intergroup- It refers to conflict between two or more units or groups within an organization.

2.3 Organizational Conflict

Having recognized that conflict is an important social concept, we can then look into the special cases of organizational conflict. Conflict is certainly one of the major organizational phenomena. Dubin, R. A (1968) observed that organizational theories "that do not admit conflict provide poor guidance in dealing with problems of organizational efficiency, stability, governance and change for conflict within and between organizations is estimably related as wither symptom, cause, or effect, to each of this problems. It has been observed by Olanrewaju (2013): that organizational conflict is an important topic for both managers and the scientist interested in understanding the nature of organizational behavior and

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organizational processes. Content analysis of syllabus on organizational behavior courses for master of business administration (MBA) students by Luisa Varriale, *et al* (2013) indicated that conflict was the fifth most frequently mentioned.

2.4 Theories of Organizational Conflicts
The following are some of the theories of organizational conflict;

2.4.1 The Classical View of Organizational Conflicts
The classical organization theorists (Fayol 1916/1949) Gulick & Urwick 1934; Taylor 1911; Weber 1929/1947) did not seem to appreciate different impacts that conflict can have on organizations. They implicitly assumed that conflict was deterimental to organisational efficiency and therefore should be minimized in organizations. They prescribed organization structures-rules and procedure, hierarchy, channel of command, so that members would be unlikely to engage in conflict. This approach to managing organizations was based on the assumption that harmony, corporation, and the absence of conflict were appropriate for achieving organizational effectiveness.

2.4.2 The Neo-classical View of Organizational Conflicts.
The studies of Elton Mayo (1923) during the 1920s and 1930s, which led to the human relations movement, also emphasised the need for minimization or elimination of conflict for increasing organizational effectiveness. Conflict to Mayo was neither inevitable nor economic. It was a result of the maladjustment of a few men on the labour side of the picture. Even safer Hawthome forced Mayo to grow; he remained firm in his conviction that conflict was an evil, a symptom of the lack of social skills. Cooperation, for him, was symptomatic of health. (Baritz, 1960).

Over time, the human relations theory found other supporters such as Lewin (1948), Likert (1967), and Whyte (1951). Taylor, fayol Weber, and Mayo intended to reduce conflict for enhancing organizational efficiency, but they followed different routes. Whereas Taylor, Fayol and Weber attempted to reduce conflict by altering the technical structural system of the organization, Mayo attempted to accomplish this by altering its social system.

Thus, it can be observed that the classical organizational theorists, with the exception of Follet, did not incorporate a conflict variable into their models. These theorists "viewed conflict as undesirable, detrimental to the organization. Ideally it should not exist. The prescription was simple. Eliminate it" (Litterer, 1966). The classicists did not, however, explicitly state that conflict should be eliminated from organizations. They of course, implicitly assumed that conflict was not desirable for an organization and should be minimized. This approach to organization and management dominated the literature during the first half of this century.

2.4.3 The Modern View of Organizational Conflicts
Litterr (1966) argued that the preceding view of classical organization theorist is similar to the view of others on the handling of tension within people. A fundamental position of many who analyzed individual behaviour was that individuals were motivated by a desire for tension reduction. The prescription in both hierarchy and organization design therefore was to take steps or make arrangements which would reduce tension within individuals. More recently it has become accepted that tension is normal, even desirable, with the thought growing that healthy personalities actually seek to increase tension.

Whyte (1967) stated the functions of organizational conflict succinctly. Harmony is an undesirable goal for the functioning of an organization. The objective should not be to build a harmonious organization, but to build an organization capable of recognizing, the problems it faces and developing ways of solving these problems. Since conflicts are an inevitable part of organizational life, it is important that conflict resolution procedure be built into the design of organizations.

The preceding line of reasoning is important in understanding the shift in conceptualization of conflict in organizations. Taking the lead from Litterer and Whyte, it can be observed that healthy organizations seek to increase intra-organizational conflict. It does not necessarily signify any organizational weakness as implied by the classical organization or human relation. Robbins (1974) presented three philosophies of

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organizational conflict: (i) the philosophy of conflict of the classicists, or traditionalists discussed earlier in this chapter, was based on the assumption that conflict was detrimental to an organization and as such, must be reduced or eliminated; (ii) The classical stage was followed by the behaviour and philosophy, which can be described as the recognition that conflict is inevitable in organizations. Behaviouralists accept the presence of conflict and even occasionally advocate the enhancement of conflict for increasing organisational effectiveness. But they have not actively created conditions that generate conflict in an organization and (iii) the philosophy of conflict of the interaction is the third philosophy which differs significantly from the previous two. It is characterized by the Recognition of the absolute necessity of conflict, explicit encouragement of opposition, Defining conflict management to include stimulation as well as resolution methods and considering the management of conflict as a major responsibility of all administrators.

2.5 Theoretical Framework

The system theory was adopted for this work as the theoretical framework because the study has to do with an organisation which has interrelated parts of which the activities of one part affects other part(s) of the organisation as the organisation is viewed as a system. System theory was proposed in the 1940s by the biologist Ludwig Von Bertalenffy, followed by General systems theory, 1968, and furthered by Ross Ashby (introduction of cybernetics, 1958).Von Bertalanffy was both reacting against reductionism and attempting to revive the unity of science. He emphasized that real systems are open to and interact with their environment and that they can acquire qualitatively new properties through emergence, resulting in continual evolution. System concept include: system-environment boundary, input, output, process, state, hierarchy, goal- directness, and information. Concerning this approach, Simon (1957) considers organisation as a social system and thus, it has to be studied in its totality. A system is a collection of inter-related parts which receives inputs, acts upon them in a planned manner and thereby produces certain outputs. The additional quality of a system depicting the management function is a feedback mechanism. A system approach is central to the analysis of the parts, which interact with one another in a given environment. The approach simply lays emphasis on input-output analysis.

According to Ikelegbe (1996), a whole which functions as whole by virtue of the interdependence of its parts is called a system and the method which aims at discovering how this is brought about in the widest variety of system has been "general system theory" a system to him is an autonomous unit of complex elements, which interact and is capable of adopting itself, and each set of element is interdependent. Cole (1996) says: if a unit or component within a system suffers a setback, the whole system will be affected and productivity and efficiency hindered. Human behaviour in organisations results from complex interaction among a number of personnel processes, including supervision, remuneration, career paths, performance appraisal and others. The challenge is to identify the interrelationship among these various processes. In applying this theory to University of Abuja, one could rightly infer that the institution comprises of interrelated parts of which the activities of one part affects other part(s) of the organisation as the organisation is viewed as a system. Power structure is diverse though not equal. That is to say, the interest groups (unions) both students, lecturers and management have a key role to play in determining the intensity and magnitude of conflict in the University. In the same vein, conflict management will also be based on diverse interest groups. This means that, the management of University of Abuja must be ready and willing to dialogue with all whenever there's organisational conflict. On the whole, the management of University of Abuja should be able to accommodate the interest of groups because system approach is central to the analysis of the parts, which interact with one another in a given environment.

3. Methodology

This research employed both primary and secondary sources of data collection. The primary data which is the administration of questionnaires were distributed to students (i.e. undergraduate regular students), lecturers and management in the University of Abuja, F.C.T. The secondary data includes text books, internet, unpublished work and other relevant materials that will provide useful information for the research. This research adopts a survey research design and simple random sampling technique and the researcher administered a total of 100 questionnaires to the students.The data generated in this study were analysed with percentage and presented in tables. The chi-square is used to test the hypothesis.

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4. Results and Discussions

Table 1: Respondents opinion on whether organizational conflict in the University of Abuja affects students' performance in examinations

Opinion	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	47	53
Agree	21	24
Undecided	2	2
Disagree	11	12
Strongly disagree	8	9
Total	**89**	**100**

Source: Field survey, 2015

Table 1 shows that 47 respondents representing 53% strongly agree, 21 respondents representing 24% agree, 2 respondents representing 2% undecided, 11 respondents representing 12% disagree, while 8 respondents representing 9% of the students under study strongly disagree.

Table 2: Respondents opinion on whether organizational conflict in the University of Abuja makes the environment unfavourable for students to learn

Opinion	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Strongly agree	19	2
Agree	29	33
Undecided	11	13
Disagree	23	25
Strongly disagree	7	8
Total	**89**	**100**

Source: Field survey, 2015

Table 2 shows the opinion of respondents on whether organizational conflict in the University of Abuja makes the environment unfavourable for students to learn. The table reveals that 19 respondents representing 2% strongly agreed with the statement. Then 29 respondents representing 33% Agreed to it, 11 respondents representing 13% remained undecided and 23 respondents representing 25% disagreed with the statement while 7 respondents representing 8% strongly disagreed to it.

Table 3 shows the opinion of respondents on whether organizational conflict in the University of Abuja leads to crash programmes which affect the delivery of lectures. The table reveals that 31 respondents representing 35% strongly agreed to the statement. Secondly 11 respondents representing 12% agreed to it. Thirdly, 21 respondents representing 24% undecided, while 17 respondents representing 19% disagreed, and 9 respondents representing 10% strongly disagreed to this statement.

Table 3: Respondents opinion on whether organizational conflict in the University of Abuja leads to crash programmes which affects the delivery of lectures

Opinion	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Strongly agree	31	35
Agree	11	12
Undecided	21	24
Disagree	17	19
Strongly disagree	9	10
Total	**89**	**100**

Source: Field survey, 2015

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Table 4 shows that 14 respondents representing 16% strongly agreed to the statement while 21 respondents representing 24% agreed. Then 4 respondents representing 4% were undecided. Furthermore, 33 respondent representing 37% disagreed while 17 respondents representing 19% strongly disagreed. The majority of respondent (i.e 56%) hold the view that organizational conflict in the University of Abuja often leads to disorganization of students' personal life on campus.

Table 4: Respondents Opinion on whether organizational conflict in the University of Abuja often leads to disorganization of students' personal life on campus

Opinion	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Strongly agree	14	16
Agree	21	24
Undecided	4	4
Disagree	33	37
Strongly disagree	17	19
Total	**89**	**100**

Source: Field survey, 2015

4.1 Testing of Hypothesis

H_o: *Organizational conflict in the University of Abuja is not the major cause of poor performance of students since 2011 to 2015.*

To test the Null hypothesis, Tables 1, 2, 3, and 4 are used as shown in Table 5:

Table 5: Contingency Table

Description	Agreement Category	Disagreement Category	Row total
Organizational conflict in the University of Abuja affects students performance in exam	68	19	87
Organizational conflicts in the University of Abuja make the environment unfavourable for students to learn.	48	30	78
Organizational conflict in the University of Abuja leads to crash programmes which affect the delivery of lecturers.	42	26	68
Organizational conflict in the University of Abuja often lead to disorganization of students personal life on campus	35	50	85
Column Total	193	125	318

Source: Computed by the Author

Table 6: Expected frequencies of Table 4.2

Cell	O	E
1	68	53
2	19	34
3	48	47
4	30	31
5	42	41
6	26	27
7	35	52
8	50	33

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Table 7: Chi –Square (X^2) Table

Cell	O	E	O-E	$(O-E)^2$	$\dfrac{(O-E)^2}{E}$
1	68	53	15	225	4.25
2	19	34	-15	225	6.62
3	48	47	1	1	0.02
4	30	31	-1	1	0.03
5	42	41	1	1	0.02
6	26	27	1	1	0.04
7	35	52	17	289	5.56
8	50	33	17	289	8.76
Chi-Square					**25.3**

Df = 3, critical value = 7.815

Decision: If the calculated or observed value of the test statistics chi-square is greater than the value of the critical value, the null hypothesis should be rejected and the alternative accepted. In Table 7, the chi-square (X^2) calculated of 25.3 is greater than the critical value of 7.815 (25.3 > 7.815) at 0.05 significant value. Therefore, the hypothesis is rejected. Thus, organizational conflict in the University of Abuja is the major cause of low performance of students since 2011 to 2015.

4.2 Summary of Findings
1. Organizational conflict in the University of Abuja is the major cause of poor performance of students since 2011 to 2015.
2. University of Abuja has no good learning environment for its students.
3. Conflict in the University of Abuja is difficult to manage because of the absence of a culture of dialogue between parties.
4. Organizational conflict in University of Abuja often impedes the academic development and promotion of lecturers.
5. Management is not democratic in handling students and staff affairs in decision making process that involve them.

4.3 Discussions of Findings
The findings of this study reveal that organizational conflict in the University of Abuja is the major cause of low performance of students from 2011 to early 2015. During the field survey, it was revealed that students were writing examination under tension and the trauma of harassment by security personnel on and off campus causes a severe psychological and emotional breakdown by students which affected their performance in examination. The burning of the chemistry laboratory was also another problem that affected teaching and learning as it disrupted practical examination in the department. Vanguard (2013):, Alabi (2002); Ibbs, W. (2012) and Olugbile (2005) confirm the view of the existence of recurring conflict at the University of Abuja that Nigerian Universities witnessed series of organizational conflict over the years. Many of the conflicts in University of Abuja often led to anarchy on campuses, disorganization of school activities, disruption of lives and properties and rendered school environments completely insecure for serious academic activities.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations
5.1 Conclusion
This study reveals that conflict in the University of Abuja has not been managed effectively to provide for a conducive learning environment. Despite the availability of funds in the University, both staff and students did not receive proper services and conducive environment. This is because organisational conflict has created a dichotomy between students and lecturers, and between lecturers themselves. The analysis of organisational conflict in the University of Abuja shows that the conflict is the major cause of

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low performance of students since 2011 to 2015. The data revealed that students were writing examinations under tension and trauma of harassment by security personnel. This therefore caused severe psychological and emotional breakdown which invariably affected the performance in examination. In recognising the fact that organisation conflict is difficult to manage, the absence of culture of dialogue between the parties, and also the stubbornness of the University authority have contributed to the escalation of the conflict.

5.2 Recommendations

From the analysis and discussions of the study, the researcher has made the following recommendations with the hope that they will go a long way in achieving an effective management of organisational conflict in the University of Abuja:

1. It is recommended that the management should provide a good learning environment for its students. The management should ensure that the environment is conducive for learning so as to produce well-trained graduates.
2. It is also recommended that a committee that would look into matters of the University in order to avoid future conflict and bring about culture of dialogue between conflicting parties should be set up.
3. The researcher upholds the desirability of the management involving the Student Union Government and staff unions on issues that concerned them, since conflict is inevitable in any organisation.
4. The University should endeavour to meet the needs of the students and lecturers adequately as well as the administrative needs of the University as a whole.
5. Management should be more democratic in handling student and staff affairs in decision making process that involved them.

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