

See discussions, stats, and author profiles for this publication at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/311558401>

Conflicts in Organizations: Causes and Consequences

Article · January 2015

CITATION

1

READS

1,657

1 author:



[Ahmed Adamu Isa](#)

Federal College of Education, Yola

7 PUBLICATIONS 2 CITATIONS

SEE PROFILE

Some of the authors of this publication are also working on these related projects:



A REVIEW ON EFFECTS AND CHALLENGES OF STAFF RETRENCHMENT ON ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE OF COMMERCIAL BANKS [View project](#)

Conflicts in Organizations: Causes and Consequences

Ahmed Adamu Isa

Federal College of Education, Yola, Adamawa State, Nigeria
ahmedadamuisa@gmail.com

Abstract

An appropriate Human Resource management strategy is an essential ingredient for the growth of any organization. It is even more important when an organization is beset with conflicts in the management of its Human Resource. This paper therefore identifies the basic causes of conflicts in organizations such as poor communication, maltreatment of employees, inadequate in the reward system of the organization, favoritism and nepotism. Other causes of conflicts are lack of adequate resources to share equally, the presence of stress and sexual harassment. The paper also delves into the positive and negative implication of conflicts to organizations such as decline in productivity and absence of employee retention capacity among others. The paper concludes that the adverse effects of conflicts could be averted through improved working condition, the ability to properly disseminate information etc.

Keywords: Conflicts, Conflict resolution, Employee retention and Productivity

Introduction

Human resource management is the basis of all management activity, but it is not the basis of all business activity. A business may depend fundamentally on having a unique product. The basis of management is always the same that is getting people of the business to make things happen in a productive way, so that the business prospers and the people thrive, Torrington, Hall, Taylor and Atkinson (2011). Employee relation is the HR discipline concerned with strengthening the employer-employee relationship through measuring job satisfaction, employee engagement and resolving workplace conflict. Labor relations functions may include developing management response to union organizing campaigns, used of collective bargaining agreements and rendering interpretations of labor union contract issues. According to Cooke (2007) "Performance management is a process by which managers and employees work together to plan, monitor and review an employee's work objectives and overall contribution to the organization. More than just an annual performance review, performance management is the continuous process of setting objectives, assessing progress and providing on-going coaching and feedback to ensure that employees are meeting their objectives and career goals". Therefore, in any organization efficient and effective performance of the resources available to achieve organizational goals most put in place a good working relationship among the workers as well as the employer. Maintenance of human resource is the supportive function of human resource management. Through it the employee receives his due shares of wages and salaries, rewards and sanctions, psychological motivation,

wholesome and safe physical working condition. Conflicts as a source of poor employee relation and it can result to low productivity. Difficult to retained workers and it affects management performance, if it is not tactically handled. Maicibi (2007), point out that whatever may be the conflict base, the approach to management will depend on the situation and the maturity of the conflict such as inaction when the management did not take any action for better or for worse, delay to take action to resolve the issue and actual conflict management.

Causes of Conflicts in Organization

According to Brookins and Media (2008) "Employee conflict in the workplace is a common occurrence, resulting from the differences in employees' personalities and values. Dealing with employee conflict in a timely manner is important to maintaining a healthy work environment. Believing that a small conflict will simply disappear is an inaccurate assumption to make because simple conflicts can grow into major problems if not dealt with appropriately. Managers should understand the common causes of employee conflicts, so that a solution is found before the issues become unmanageable." Conflict occurs in the workplace on a regular basis. Disagreements arise between colleagues. Rifts come between a manager and his employee. There are many situations, such as these that can cause conflicts among groups within an organization.

Poor Communication

Poor communication is one of the main causes of conflict between employees in the workplace. This can result in a difference in communication styles or a failure to communicate. For example, a manager reassigned an employee's task to the employee's co-worker but failed to communicate the reassignment to the employee. This may cause the employee to feel slighted, which can transform into animosity among the two employees and the manager. Failing to communicate in the workplace may cause employees to make incorrect assumptions and breeds workplace gossip. Poor communication in the workplace not only causes conflict but also decreases productivity and employee morale.

Difference in Personalities

A difference in personalities among employees is another cause of workplace conflict. Employees come from different backgrounds and experiences, which play a role in shaping their personalities. When employees fail to understand or accept the differences in each other's personalities, problems arise in the workplace. For example, an employee may possess a straightforward personality that results in him speaking whatever is on his mind, even if the timing is inappropriate. The employee with the straightforward personality may offend a co-worker that does not possess the same type of personality. The co-worker may feel as if the employee is rude or lacks the authority to deal with her in such a straightforward manner.

Lack of Resources to Share Equally

The principle of sharing is long recognized as being central to resolving the organizational crisis and improves management performance. There should be an administrative policy on how to share the available resources more equitably and sustainably in order to avoid conflict in organizations.

Stress

Stress is the feeling of being under too much mental or emotional pressure. Pressure turns into

stress when you feel unable to cope. People have different ways of reacting to stress, so a situation that feels stressful to one person may be motivating to someone else. Stress can affect how you feel, think, behave and how your body works. In fact, common signs of stress include sleeping problem, sweating, loss of appetite and difficulty in concentrating on the work. Therefore, it causes conflict among employee – employer relationship.

Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment is unwelcome behavior that happens to you because of your sex. Some types of behavior that can be considered sexual harassment are unwelcome sexual advances, request for sexual favors, or verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature. Many different kinds of conduct that are of a sexual nature may be sexual harassment, if the behavior is unwelcome and if it is severe or pervasive. However, courts have resisted adopting what they consider a workplace "code of conduct" or nature of behavior that is automatically considered to be sexual harassment. As a result, if the conduct is not unwelcome or not severe or pervasive, courts will not necessarily consider each type of conduct listed earlier to be sexual harassment. It causes conflict in organization if there is no proper code of conduct in workplace.

Implication of Labor Conflicts to Productivity and Survival of Organization

As organizations strive to achieve their goals, they are often met with challenges they must overcome as a team. Challenges leave room for conflict between members, other organizations, communities and other parties involved in the organization's mission. While "conflict" often has a negative connotation, the effects of conflict within an organization can be positive and negative, (Brookins and Media, 2002).

Members Leave Organisation

Organization members who are increasingly frustrated with the level of conflict within an organization may decide to end their membership. This is especially detrimental when members are a part of the executive board or heads of committees. Once members begin to leave, the organization has to recruit new members and appoint acting board members. In extreme cases, where several members' leave or an executive board steps down, organizations risk dissolution.

Decrease in Productivity

When an organization spends much of its time dealing with conflict, members take time away from focusing on the core goals they are tasked with achieving. Conflict causes members to focus less on the project at hand and more on gossiping out conflict or venting about frustrations. As a result, organizations can lose money, donors and access to essential resources.

Mental Health Concerns

Conflict within an organization can cause members to become frustrated if they feel as if there's no solution in sight, or if they feel that their opinions go unrecognized by other group members. As a result, members become stressed, which adversely affects their professional and personal lives. Organization members may have problems sleeping, loss of appetite or overeating, headaches and become unapproachable. In some instances, organization members may avoid meetings to prevent themselves from experiencing stress and stress related symptoms.

Violence

When conflict escalates without mediation, intense situations may arise between organization members. It's unfortunate, but organizational conflicts may cause violence among members, resulting in legal problems for members and possibly the organization.

Inspire Creativity

Fortunately, some organization members view conflict as an opportunity for finding creative solutions to solve problems. Conflict can inspire members to brainstorm ideas, while examining problems from various perspectives.

Share and Respect Opinions

As organization members work together to solve conflict, they are more willing to share their opinions with the group. Conflict can also cause members to actively listen to each as they work to accomplish the organizational goals.

Improve Future Communication

Conflict can bring group members together and help them learn more about each other, from learning each other's opinions on topics relevant to the organization's growth to understanding each member's preferred communication style. Conflict within an organization can give members the tools necessary to easily solve conflicts in the future.

Strategies for Managing Conflicts in Organisation

According to Dontigney and Demand, (2008), in any situation involving more than one person, conflict can arise. The causes of conflict range from philosophical differences and divergent goals to power imbalances. Unmanaged or poorly managed conflicts generate a breakdown in trust and lost productivity. For small businesses, where success often hinges on the cohesion of a few people, loss of trust and productivity can signal the death of the business. With a basic understanding of the five conflict management strategies, small business owners can better deal with conflicts before they escalate beyond repair.

Accommodating

The accommodating strategy essentially entails giving the opposing side what it wants. The use of accommodation often occurs when one of the parties wishes to keep the peace or perceives the issue as minor. For example, a business that requires formal dress may institute a "casual Friday" policy as a low-stakes means of keeping the peace with the rank and file. Employer who uses accommodation and provision of good working condition as a primary conflict management strategy, however, may keep track and promote quality management performance.

Career or Skills Development

Skill Development means developing yourself and your skill sets to add value for the organization and for your own career development. Fostering an attitude of appreciation for lifelong learning is the key to workplace success. Continuously learning and developing one's skills requires identifying the skills needed for productivity and then successfully seeking out trainings or on-the-job opportunities for developing those skills.

Collaborating

Collaboration works by integrating ideas set out by multiple people. The object is to find a creative solution acceptable to everyone. Collaboration, though useful, calls for a significant

time commitment not appropriate to all conflicts. For example, a business owner should work collaboratively with the manager to establish policies, but collaborative decision-making regarding office supplies wastes time better spent on other activities.

Compromising or Conflict Resolution Procedures

The compromising strategy or conflict resolution procedures typically calls for both sides of a conflict to give up elements of their position in order to establish an acceptable, if not agreeable, solution. This strategy prevails most often in conflicts where the parties hold approximately equivalent power. Business owners frequently employ compromise during contract negotiations with other businesses when each party stands to lose something valuable, such as a customer or necessary service.

Compensation Policy

Compensation is a fundamental component of employment and one of the most critical HR management policies. While compensation traditionally refers to employment wage, best practice in today's workplace considers total compensation to include basic salary, bonus or incentive plans, benefits, and non-cash compensation.

Organizations should establish and communicate clear principles by which employees are paid. At a minimum, organizations need to ensure that their compensation policy adheres to employment legislation. Elements of compensation that are regulated by provincial employment standards acts include:

- Minimum wage
- Rate of holiday pay
- Overtime pay
- Equal pay
- How often employees receive their pay
- How payment is made
- Contents of pay stub or pay sheet (information that must be tracked and reported to employees).
- Deductions
- Gratuities
- Payroll records (information that must be tracked and documented)
- Vacation pay

Additionally, many organizations adopt compensation principles that ensure fairness and equity in pay rates and salary administration, and transparency in compensation practices.

An effective compensation policy is based on objective and up-to-date job descriptions, effective job evaluation and performance management, and relevant salary administration. Salary administration encompasses establishing:

- Salary ranges
- Decision-making criteria for salary increases
- Time frames for salary review

Protect Employees from Health Hazard

It is imperative to put in place law that requires employers to provide their employees with working conditions that are free from known dangers. The Act may create the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), which sets and enforces protective workplace safety and health standards. OSHA also provides information, training and assistance to

workers and employers. Workers may file a complaint to have OSHA inspect their workplace if they believe that their employer is not following OSHA standards or that there are serious hazards.

Conclusion

It seems the causes of conflicts in industrial relations are myriad. Also conflicts among employees and between employees and management are inevitable consequences of industrial relations in any organization. However, the various strategies identified will go along way to improve labor management relations and also ensure employee retention in organizations. To achieve an optimal level of growth in organizations, there is need to put in place annual performance review in respect of working relationship between employees in organizations and provide reward for employees who proved to be good in the discharge of their saddled responsibility without delay. It is also important that conflicts resolution committee should be established in organizations to handle all cases in relation to labor disputes. The committee should call for both sides of a conflict to explain their position in order to establish an acceptable, if not agreeable, solution. Alternatively, the contribution of an arbitrator to resolve dispute between labor union and management is also an essential ingredient in conflict resolution. Administrative policies of compensation in organizations need to adopt principles that will ensure fairness and equity in pay rates and salary as well as transparency in compensation practices. This is because an effective compensation policy should be based on objective and up-to-date job descriptions, effective job evaluation and performance management.

References

- Brookins, M. and Media, D. (2002): The Business Review, Workplace Conflicts not inevitable, California, W. Bruce Newman.
- Cooke, W.N. (2007): Multinational companies and global human resource strategy: in P. Boxall, J. Purcell and P. Wright (eds): The Oxford Handbook of Human Resource Management. London, Oxford University Press
- Dontigney, E. and Media, D. (2008): Understanding Conflicts and Conflicts management. [Http://www.foundationcoalition.org/team](http://www.foundationcoalition.org/team)
- Maicibi, N. A. (2007): Human resource management success, Kampala, Makerere university printery.
- Torrington, D. et al (2011): Human resource management, England, Pearson Education limited.