

Effective Intervention Conflict Management Techniques as Perceived by Academic Staff, Non-Academic Staff and Students in Nigerian Universities

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Abstract

The study was set out to investigate the perception of academic staff, non-academic staff and students regarding forcing, smoothing, detraction, arbitration and changing the individual involved as effective intervention conflict management techniques. The investigators formulated five research hypotheses to guide the study. Effective intervention conflict management technique Questionnaire (EICMTQ) was used to collect data. The EICMTQ was made up of twenty items and respondents were asked to tick (✓) the statement that represent their opinion, using a 5 point Likert Scale. A total of three thousand and fifteen respondents participated in the study. They all filled and returned their copies of the questionnaire showing one hundred percent return rate. The investigators added up the scores for the academic staff, non-academic staff and students and employed One Way Analysis of Variance to determine the difference among the academic staff, non-academic staff and students in their perception of forcing, smoothing, detraction, arbitration and changing the individuals involved as effective intervention conflict management strategies. The study found out that there is no significant difference among academic staff, non-academic staff and students in their perception of forcing, smoothing, detraction, arbitration and changing the individuals involved as effective intervention conflict management techniques. The study found out that arbitration had the highest F value of 19.1 and forcing had the least F. Value of 3.3. We concluded that forcing, smoothing, detraction, arbitration and changing the individuals involved were all found effective in resolving conflict in our universities even though the use of some of them were characterized with some problems. We however, recommended that forcing may only be used as last resort.

Keywords: Conflict; intervention; Management techniques; academic staff; students

INTRODUCTION

Conflict may be an inevitable thing in any organization. This is because people in the organization are made up of different background, needs value and aspiration. Ejiogu (1990) pointed out that conflict is bound to occur from time to time in all human interaction and organizational behaviour. Gordon (1996:375) stressed that conflict may have positive and negative outcomes, that is, functional and dysfunctional outcomes. Functional conflict may lead to a search for new approaches that may resolve disagreement on long standing problems. On the other hand, conflict may also be dysfunctional for organizations resulting in reduced production, lower morale, overwhelming, dissatisfaction, increased tension and stress.

Donohue and Kolt (1992:3) maintained that conflict involves situations in which differences are expressed by interdependent people in the process of achieving their needs and goals, and it arises when a difference between two or more people necessitates change in at least one person in order for their engagement to continue and develop. Jordan (1990:4) however asserted that the differences cannot coexist without some adjustment.

Tucker (1981) maintained that there may be conflict between teacher and students and stated that:

Conflict between faculty members and Students commonly begins with students complaints about a faculty member's teaching performance and grading practices or with a faculty member's charged for cheating or plagiarism,. Students complaints about faculty members sometimes grow into wholesale protest or demonstration especially when students feel that their rights to due process has been violated.

In 1994, it appears there was conflict between the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) University of Benin (Uniben) branch and the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS) Uniben branch. The conflict involved the abduction of Dr. A. Afejuku, an ASUU member by NANS executive. In a protest letter to the the nVice-Chancellor as reported by Onokerhoraye (2006:413).

The ASUU member Dr. A. Afejuku alleged that he was abducted on Monday 21st of March, 1994, at about 9.00 a.m. and was not released until about 3.00p.m. He maintained that his offence was that students failed his courses NO. ENL 112, entitled introduction to Prose Fiction. He said that during the period of his abduction, he was harassed, abused and traumatized. For all this, he was seeking redress.

The then Vice-Chancellor, Professor (Onokerhoraye) quickly set up a committee headed by Professor D.N. Nwokoye to investigate the circumstances that led to the ugly incident identify the culprits and make appropriate recommendations to avoid a recurrence.

A well-attended ASUU congress met over the abduction of one of its members. after proper deliberation on the issue of abduction episode, ASUU wrote a letter to the Vice-Chancellor that:

Its members would not participate in the rescheduled second semester examination of the 1993/94 session till Monday 28, March 1994.

ASUU maintained that its action is in protest against the action of the Students' Union executive. We are not on strike. Dimowo and Ofuani (1994:1-2).

In the Delta State University DELSU Abraka, the entire students' body led by its executive on June 20, 2000 embarked on violent demonstration to neighbouring towns of Warri and Asaba. During the demonstration, public and private properties were destroyed. The immediate cause of the demonstration was that the National Electric Power Authority (NEPA) failed to supply light.

The Senate of DELSU set up a Panel to investigate the incident and make recommendations. One of the recommendations to Senate was that the Vice-Chancellor should dissolve the Students' Union executive. So on, Tuesday 12, September, 2000, Professor Uvie Igun, the then Vice-Chancellor announced the dissolution of the students union executive in line with Senate's adoption of the recommendation of the Panel. But the Vice-Chancellor was shocked to find that a body of Student led by the Union's President Mr. Michael Akpobore invaded the Vice-chancellor's lodge at about 8.00p.m. of the same day with sticks and other instruments kidnapped and by beatings and slapping and other forms of humiliation before throwing the Vice-Chancellor across the fence into awaiting students union vehicle and drove him towards Warri and thereafter to Ambrose Alli University (AAU) Ekpoma. The intention was later to take the Vice-Chancellor to JOs, the Zonal Headquarter of National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS) for trial. But for timely intervention of well meaning Nigerians, the Vice-Chancellor was released. The students who were involved in the kidnapping of the Vice-Chancellor were later tried by the Senate of DELSU and those found guilty were subsequently expelled.

Salary parity has often generated conflict between the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) and the Non-Academic Staff Union of Universities (NASU) ASUU is against salary parity while NASU is in favour. ASUU had embarked on series of strike in 1993 in order to get a separate salary structure. Eventually ASUU's request was granted by the Federal government and a separate salary structure referred to as University Academic Salary Structure (UASS) was put in place. As would be expected, NASU on its own maintained that, unless, a uniform salary structure is operated for all categories of staff in Nigerian Universities, its members would go on strike, probably this was why Imogie (2005:165) reported that:

The Non- Academic Staff operating under two separate unions namely NASU and Senior Staff Association of Nigerian Universities (SSANU) on their own part were very strongly in favour of parity were already warning up for yet another set of strike if parity was not maintained in the payment of salaries and allowances to all categories of staff in Nigerian Universities.

It appears that since 2002, there have been conflict in the University of Ilorin between the university Authority backed by the Federal Government and the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) University of Ilorin (UNILORIN) branch. The immediate cause of the conflict was that the University Authority sacked 49 lecturers because they participated in a National Strike called by ASUU. The sacked lecturers went to court to seek redress. And the court decided the case in favour of the sacked Lecturers. But despite legal victory, the lecturers were yet to get their jobs back.

Probably this is why the National body of Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) has been insisting that the sacked lecturers must be re-instated. ASUU by June 2006 was already threatening strike over the non-re-instatement and the issue of re-negotiation of agreement reached with Federal Government in 2001. The agreement has been due for re-negotiation since 2004 but the Federal Government has not been cooperating. May be this was why the Daily Vanguard News paper Saturday July 1, 2006, under its column News on strike: Babalola faults ASUU, the Chairman of the Committee of Pro-Chancellors of Nigerian Universities, Chief Afe Babalola was asked why it was difficult for the Federal Government to obey the court judgement delivered in favour of the 49 lecturers in the University of Ilorin.

Chief Afe Babalola responded. I think you are over simplifying the situation. In my own little understanding of the law, once a matter is before the court of law all of us, if you are civilized should respect it. There is an application against that judgement you are referring to and I understand that there is a motion for stay. Therefore, it is not open for anybody to act on it.

On the issue of the 2001 Federal Government/ASUU agreement he said,

There was a case on it. He underscored the importance of agreement. Agreement should be honoured in performance and not in breach. I believe there is need to meet them and discuss. I have got in touch with the leadership and we are meeting on Monday July 3, 2006.

Peretomode (1995:56) has stressed that intervention conflict management strategies are those in which managers of organizations or school administrators being aware of the existence of conflict situation intervene to modify or settle conflict between the parties involved. Among the intervention strategies identified by Peretomode are:

Smoothing
Forcing
Detraction
Encapsulation
Arbitration
Majority rule
Changing the individuals involved
Restructuring the organization
Expansion of resource

However, the investigators have limited the investigation to smoothing forcing, detraction, arbitration and changing the individuals involved.

Smoothing

In using smoothing as intervention conflict management technique, the manager discourages the difference between the parties involved in the conflict and encourages what they have as common interest. In support of this szilagyi (1981) maintained that:

Shared common interest on certain issues facilitate movement towards a common goal.

As far as Blake and Nouton are concerned smoothing involves the loser of the win-lose configuration and represented high cooperation with the needs of others along with low assertiveness of one's own, needs. They also stressed that smoothing or internationally losing could even be used in conflict over issues one did not feel particularly strong about who used to help out a fellow workers who faced stress from other areas.

Forcing

The manager is third party and he can use forcing as means of putting an end to the conflict. It appears to be the oldest, but popularly used by administrators in the resolution of conflict. Probably, this was why Ivancevich and Matterson 1987 asserted that:

In using forcing management simply resolves the conflict as it deems fit and communicates its decisions to the individuals or groups involved.

Best (2004:111) asserted that the introduction of Police and other law enforcement authorities may call for the use of extra-ordinary measures, including force to restore law and order. This could further lead to human rights violation of various descriptions. African military and Police Services some times display high-handedness, excesses and unprofessional conduct in these services.

Detraction

The use of detraction involves the managers' provision of much work to the parties in the conflict in order to remove their mind from the conflict.

Huth and Russett (1993) maintained that the purpose of detraction is to prevent the escalation of the conflict to a dangerous dimension and therefore, it qualifies as a strategy to contain hostile competition below a given threshold. Detraction is based on the national calculation that the costs of escalation outweigh potential benefits.

Arbitration

The parties involved in the conflict (dispute) submit it to the judgement of a third person referred to as an arbitrator. The decision of the arbitrator is binding on all the parties in the conflict.

As far as Ovwigho (2004:78) is concerned both parties in the conflict are brought together for peaceful settlement of the issue by a third party called arbitrator and consultant who might be important and of exemplary behaviour. Traditional rulers, religious leaders and prominent members of the society are often used. The arbitrator prevails on those involved in the conflict to drop their hostility and embrace mutual concession. Ovwigho finally asserted that the frequent use of third party intervention may give impression that the leader has lost control of the system.

Zartman (2002:22) maintained that in traditional African arbitration the agent is a neutral and powerless third party armed with personal characteristics such as wisdom and integrity.

Changing the Individuals Involved

This technique gives the manager power to transfer one or both parties involved in the conflict in order to alter their relationship. In very serious situation some key persons in the conflict may be fired by being removed.

This was corroborated by Peretomode (1995: 59) when he asserted that:

This technique request the conflicting parties to be separated kept apart until they agree to a solution, or transferring one or both to another parts of the organization. In the extreme, the approach requires the removal of key figures in the conflict situation firing one or both of them.

Statement of the Problem

The literature seems to suggest that the university system in Nigeria is characterized with conflict. The problem in this study therefore is how did academic staff, non-academic staff and students perceive intervention management techniques as being effective in the resolution of conflict in Nigerian Universities. Specifically, five research hypotheses were formulated by the researchers to guide the study:

1. There is no significant difference among academic staff, non-academic staff and students in their perception of smoothing as an effective intervention conflict management technique.
2. There is no significant difference among academic staff, non-academic staff and students in their perception of forcing as an effective intervention conflict management technique.
3. There is no significant difference among academic staff, non-academic staff and students in their perception of detraction as an effective intervention conflict management technique.
4. There is no significant difference among academic staff, non-academic staff and students in their perception of arbitration as an effective intervention conflict management technique.
5. There is no significant difference among academic staff, non-academic staff and students in their perception of changing the individuals involved as an effective intervention conflict management technique.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This study used Ex-post facto research design. Asika (2002:34) maintained that this is a systematic empirical study in which the researcher does not in any way control or manipulate independent variable because the situation for the study already exists or has already taken place. The investigators made use of an instrument known as an Effective Intervention Conflict Management Technique Questionnaire (EICMTQ) and consisted of twenty items. The instrument had reliability co-efficient of 0.85. The respondents were asked to tick (✓) the statement that represent their opinion concerning effective intervention conflict management technique using a 5 point Likert Scale.

The population of the study consisted of all members of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) and the Non-Academic Senior Staff Association of Universities (SSANU) all the members of the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS) in all the twenty four (24) Federal Universities and all the twenty six (26) state owned universities in Nigeria. The researchers used the random sampling technique to select six (25%) conflict prone Federal Universities and six (23%) conflict prone Universities that participated in the study.

The investigators used the random sampling technique to select one thousand and five (1,005) ASUU executive and congress members, One thousand and five (1,005) SSANU executive and congress members and one thousand and five (1,005) NANS executive and students Representative Council (S.R.C.) members that took part in the study. They have been sampled on the ground that they may have participated in the process of conflict management of their various universities.

The researchers visited four (04) Universities each to administer Copies of the questionnaire on the respondents. The investigators were assisted by ASUU, SSANU and NANS leadership to administer copies of the questionnaire on the respondents. All the three thousand and fifteen (3015) Copies of the questionnaire administered were filled and retrieved showing one hundred percent return rate.

The investigators added up all the scores for the academic staff, non-academic staff and students and employed One Way Analysis of Variance to determine the difference among the academic staff, non-academic staff and students in their perception of effective intervention conflict management technique as means of resolving conflict in Nigerian universities. The results of the investigation have been reported in five tables as follows:

RESULTS

Hypotheses One

There is no significant difference among academic staff, non-academic staff and students in their perception of smoothing as an effective intervention conflict management technique.

Table 1. Difference in perception among academic staff, non-academic staff and students regarding smoothing as an effective intervention conflict management technique, using one way analysis of variance.

Source of variance	Df	Sum of squares	Mean square	F.Cal	F. Crit.
Between groups	2	4.249.009	2124.504	14.1	19.3
Within groups	3012	44.33900.53	149.377		
Total	3014	44.8149.53			

Source: Field Work

The analysis in table 1 shows that the calculated F value of 14.4 is less than critical F value of 19.3 at 2/3012 degree freedom and at 0.05 level of significance. Hence, the hypothesis which says that there is no significant difference among academic staff, non-academic staff and students in their perception of smoothing as an effective intervention conflict management technique is upheld.

Hypothesis Two

There is no significant difference among academic staff, non-academic staff and students in their perception of forcing as an effective intervention conflict management technique.

Table 2. Difference among academic staff, non-academic staff and students regarding forcing as an effective intervention conflict management technique, using one way analysis of variance.

Source of variance	Df	Sum of squares	Mean square	F.Cal	F. Crit.
Between groups	2	970.994	485.497	3.3	19.3
Within groups	3012	442.708.11	146.981		
Total	3014	4436.110			

Source: Field Work

The analysis in table 2 shows that the calculated F value of 3.3 is less than critical F value of 19.3 at 2/3012 degree freedom and at 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, the hypothesis which says that there is no significant difference among academic staff, non-academic staff and students in their perception of forcing as an effective intervention conflict management technique is accepted.

Hypothesis Three

There is no significant difference among academic staff, non-academic staff and students in their perception of detraction as an effective intervention conflict management technique.

Table 3. Difference among academic staff, non-academic staff and students regarding detraction as an effective intervention conflict management technique, using one way analysis of variance.

Source of variance	Df	Sum of squares	Mean square	F.Cal	F. Crit.
Between groups	2	1690.190	845.065	5.6	19.3
Within groups	3012	453793.54	1560.662		
Total	3014	455483.73			

Source: Field Work

The analysis in table 3 shows that the calculated F value of 5.6 is less than critical F value of 19.3 at 2/3012 degree freedom and at 0.05 level of significance. Hence the hypothesis which says that there is no significant difference among academic staff, non-academic staff and students in their perception of detraction as an effective intervention conflict management technique is hereby upheld.

Hypothesis Four

There is no significant difference among academic staff, non-academic staff and students in their perception of arbitration as an effective intervention conflict management technique.

Table 4. Difference among academic staff, non-academic staff and students regarding arbitration as an effective intervention conflict management technique, using one way analysis of variance.

Source of variance	Df	Sum of squares	Mean square	F.Cal	F. Crit.
Between groups	2	5622.586	2811.293	19.1	19.3
Within groups	3012	442298.47	146.845		
Total	3014	447921.06			

Source: Field Work

The analysis in table 4 shows that there is no significant difference among academic staff, non-academic staff and students in their perception of arbitration as an effective intervention conflict management technique. This is because critical F value of 19.3 is greater than calculated F value of 19.1 at 2/3012 degree freedom and at 0.05 level of significance. The hypothesis which says that there is no significant difference among academic staff, non-academic staff and students in their perception of arbitration as an effective intervention conflict management technique is therefore accepted.

Hypothesis Five

There is no significant difference among academic staff, non-academic staff and students in their perception of changing the individuals involved as an effective intervention conflict management technique.

Table 5. Difference among academic staff, non-academic staff and students regarding changing the individuals involved as an effective intervention conflict management technique, using one way analysis of variance.

Source of variance	Df	Sum of squares	Mean square	F.Cal	F. Crit.
Between groups	2	2577.784	1288.892	9.3	19.3
Within groups	3012	417396.75	138.578		
Total	3014	419974.33			

Source: Field Work

The analysis in table 5 indicate that calculated F value of 9.3 is less than critical F value of 19.3 at 2/3012 degree freedom and at 0.05 level of significance. The hypothesis which says that there is no significant difference among academic staff, non-academic staff and students in their perception of changing the individuals involved as an effective intervention conflict management technique is upheld.

DISCUSSION

One of the findings of this investigation showed that there is no significant difference among academic staff, non-academic staff and students in their perception of smoothing as an effective intervention conflict management technique. This seems to give credence to the literature which says that the manager discourages the difference between the parties involved in the conflict and encourages what they have as common interest. Of course, this position was supported by Szilagyi in 1981 when he asserted that, "shared common interest on certain issue facilitate movement towards a common goal". For example, academic staff and non-academic staff differ strongly over salary parity while academic staff and students differ sharply over the issue of abduction of a lecturer in the University of Benin. Even though these differences exist, academic staff, non-academic staff, and students still work towards the common goal of the universities' in Nigeria, hence the calculated F. value of 14.4. Another finding has shown that there is no significant difference among academic staff, non-academic staff and students in their perception of forcing as an effective intervention conflict management technique. Best's position (2004: 111) seems to be at variance with the finding that regards forcing as an effective intervention conflict management technique. This is because best asserted that the use of force may probably lead to human rights violation of various descriptions. Best equally affirmed that the use of African military and police services sometimes display highhandedness, excesses and unprofessional conduct in these services. Probably, this was why forcing only yielded a calculated F value of 3.3.

The study also found out that there is no significant difference among academic staff-non-academic' staff and students in their perception of detraction as an effective intervention conflict management technique. The finding disagrees with Huth and Russett (1993) who asserted that the purpose' of detraction is to prevent the escalation of the conflict to a dangerous dimension and not as an effective intervention conflict management technique. The investigators were even skeptical about the use of detraction as an effective means of resolving conflict, because it may amount to postponing the evil days:

The present investigation has also found out that there is no significant difference among academic staff, non-academic staff and students' in their perceptions of arbitration as all effective intervention conflict management technique. The investigators are tempted to believe that this finding agrees with Ovwigho's position in (2004) to the extent that both parties in the conflict are brought together for a peaceful settlement of the issue by a party called arbitrator. On the other hand, Ovwigho (2004) disagreed with the finding of this study when he asserted that the frequent use of the third party intervention may give an impression that the leader has lost control of the system. However, the use of arbitration has proved to be the most effective means of resolving conflict since it has the highest calculated F-value of 19.1.

Finally, the investigation found out that there is no significant difference among academic staff, non-academic staff and students in their perception of changing the individual involved as an effective means of resolving conflict. The finding of this study corroborates Peretomode (1995) in his assertion that "in the extreme, the key figures in the conflict situation may be removed or fired. When the key figures are fired, the conflict may have been effectively resolved.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion that may be drawn based on the findings of the investigation, is that smoothing, forcing, detraction, arbitration, and changing the individuals involved have been found effective as means of resolving conflict. Arbitration was found to be the most effective because it has the highest F value of 19.1 while forcing was found to be the least effective because its F value was 3.3.

RECOMMENDATION

As a result of the findings and conclusion, we recommend that university administrators may use smoothing, forcing, detraction, arbitration and changing the individuals involved as means of intervention in the management of conflict since they have all been found effective. However, the use of force as means of resolving conflict should be a last resort since it has been found to be the least effective.

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