An Evaluation of Conflict Management Styles of Academic Staff in Selected Primary Schools of Samburu Division, Kwale County, Kenya

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Abstract: *The study was set to look into conflict Management styles of Academic Staff in selected Primary Schools of Samburu Division, Kwale County, Kenya. The study was set to identify the type of conflict management styles utilized by the respondents. The study adopted on descriptive design. The research population involved 340 academic staff and a sample size of 184 teachers was obtained using the Solvins formula. Simple random sampling technique was used in selecting schools and again systematic sampling technique was applied to get the target population. The null hypothesis was tested using two comparative statistical tools; one being the student's samples t-test and the fisher's one-way analysis of variances (ANOVA). The study findings were; conflict management style did not significantly differ according to teacher's demographic characteristics thus the null hypothesis was accepted. The conclusions of the findings were that both male and female academic staff of Kinango District utilized similar conflict management style of smoothing. The researchers recommended for expansion of the Kenya Primary school Education Curriculum to include contents of Conflict Management Techniques to empower the conflict management behavior of the primary school teachers.*

Keywords: *conflict management styles, academic staff, smoothing (compromising), Gender,*

I. Introduction

The problem of conflict and conflict management in labor organizations has become an issue of great concern to both the government and employers of labor in the organized private sectors especially in the developing countries of the world. This is because, despite the operation of the existing machineries for instance collective bargaining and statutory machinery for conflict management, the incidence of industrial conflict is consistently on the increase (Onyeonoru,2004; Kester, Samuel and Bankole, 2006; 2007).The inability of the available conflict resolution machineries to stop the menace of industrial conflict has prompted some industrial relations experts to advocate for better alternative options such as social dialogue, peace education, UNESCOS peace culture and a host of others (Abu, 1998; Ajala, 2003; Onyeonoru, 2006)

Essential, conflict as a phenomenon is inevitable in every human grouping. This is interests and goals by different individuals that constitute an organization (Edwards, 2000; Otite 2001; Onyeonuru, 2004) However, some past studies have shown that the outcome of conflict is determined largely by the conflict management behavior exhibited by the parties involved in conflict (Hammed and Ayantunji, 2002; Omoluabi, 2001; Akanji, 2005; Mitchell, 2002; Bankole and Kester, 2008). In essence, either the consequence of a conflict can be functional (positively) or dysfunctional (negative) depending on how the conflict is managed by the conflicting parties. This implies that the conflict management behavior of the parties in conflict is critical tome of the outcome of the conflict.

In one of their studies, Hammed and Ayantunji (2002) affirmed that industrial conflict as found in most organizations today hinders on conflict management behavior of both labor leaders (appointed or elected) and the management of the organization. Thus in this study, the researchers focused on the conflict management styles put in place by the academic staff of selected Public Primary Schools of Samburu Division, Kwale County, Kenya.

II. Statement Of The Problem

It is a known fact that conflict in the work environment is inevitable, when two or more people have to work, together and combine ideas; the doorway of conflict is ever open. The goal is to learn how to use conflict as a tool that can benefit the whole rather than destroy it and the idea of concern. In a school organization, the administration and any other stakeholders within the school community are able to recognize a conflict, instill conflict management styles and make sure that those strategies are executed successfully to create harmony among the academic staff.

Even though they are able to handle conflict situations through different existing conflict management styles such as forcing (co- meeting) avoiding and compromising (smoothing) they have not been able to establish the best conflict management style among three. Thus, this study was set to analyze various forms of conflict management and conflict management styles in school organization.

III.   Purpose Of The Study

The purpose of the study was to analyze the various forms of conflict management and conflict management styles In addition, the conflict management styles utilized by the academic staff of Samburu Division, Kwale County.

IV.   Objectives Of The Study

1. To determine the various forms of conflict management utilized in schools by the academic staff of Samburu Division , Kwale County
2. To establish the types of conflict management styles utilized by the academic staff of Samburu Division , Kwale County.

V.   Significance Of The Study

In any institution, performance can be enhanced through harmonious co-existence between various stakeholders. Therefore, this study was meant to assists the following individuals: teachers would improve in their work relationships and minimize the negative effects of conflict by analyzing the forms of conflict and conflict managements types; in addition these findings would assist the school administration to recognize the needs of the academic staff and other subordinates so as to minimize conflicts among them.

VI.   Literature Review

6.1. Conflict Management

In any institution, disagreement is common; this arises when there is discussion of ideas and coming up with solutions to problems and it may involves differing opinions being challenged and discussed. Study by Marra (2012) establish that Conflict commences at the hiring process by considering individuals communication styles and bearing in mind how different goals, interests and interpersonal relationship. Conflicts in work place are portrayed by irreconcilable of goals, irreconcilable of actions, and alleged interdependence between the parties (Wang, Fink & Cai, 2012). This indicate that conflict exist because of different priorities between two or more parties who are mutually dependent.

Conflict is described as the struggle between two mutually supporting parties who recognize mismatched goals (Wilmont & Hocker, 2001). According to Wilmont and Hocker (2001), conflict management styles response that has some patterns that people use in conflict. Thus, literature indicates that conflict management style is common way, which people use against certain conflict. The idea of stimulating conflict cannot be accepted since it is perceived traditionally that conflict has more of negative implication. However, some studies have established that increased conflict improves performance (Allison, 1971). In addition, stimulation of conflict should be monitored to minimize its potential negative impact and avoid costly mending operation later in an organization.

According to Bailey (1971) administrators who use technique or style in resolving conflicts, originating from subordinates conflicts and lateral conflicts is either genius or fool. Thus, it can be inferred that conflict has been dealt with when it no longer interferes with ongoing events. According to Greenhalgh (1986), conflict management is the process of eliminating cognitive blockades to agreement.

6.2. Types of Conflicts

Administration is eventually in charge for identifying a conflict, in fusing conflict resolution strategies and ensuring these strategies is implemented successfully. For any school administration to attain this goal, administration has to be aware of the types of conflict such as constructive and deconstructive. Constructive conflict is helpful to teams. This type of conflict hubson the issue on the other hand continuing to maintain respect for other teammates.

Teammates in most cases do display flexibility, supportiveness and cooperation to each other. They usually value the success of the team. Deconstructive conflict, however, showsself-centeredbehaviors of personal attacks, insults and defensiveness. Within the team, no flexibility is present and competition between the teammates is apparent (UOP, 2004).The capability to know the types of conflict permits administration to administer the conflict in accordance to the goal of a positive outcome.

6.3.; Conflict Management Styles

Mitchell (2002) quoting Thomas and Kilman (1976), identified five conflict management independent dimensions of interpersonal behaviors namely; assertiveness and cooperativeness. The five identified conflict management behaviors are competing, accommodating, avoiding collaborating and compromising.

Competing / forcing: It depts., a situation in which one has high concern for self and low concern for others. Thus, a person adopting his behavior pursues his concern at the expense of others. It is a power oriented behavior with efforts typically in "a win – lose" fashion.

Avoiding - This has to do with having low concern for self and for others. It is process where the individual tries to avoid the other person or pretend that the conflict does not exist even when the individual is hurt and angry. This approach does not solve the problem but post pones the evil day. Thus, it leaves the parties feeling more annoyed, resentful and frustrated.

Compromising: it involves finding a neutrally acceptable solution that partially satisfies both parties. It is an approach to conflict handling. Through some resent studies had identified some psychological skills such as emotional intelligence, communication skills, self-efficacy, critical thinking skills and a host of others that can stimulate positive general behavior in individuals, including conflict management behavior of labor leaders (Thomas and Kilmann's, 1976).

Study by chusmir and Mills (1989), assessed men and women managers at three levels of management (top-level, middle level and supervisors). It was established that managers at higher levels reported more competing and less accommodating than managers at lower levels. Moreover, in the same study it was established that conflict style adopted depends on management level in competing but not to collaboration.

However, Maicibi, (2007) also supported the Kilmann and Thomas (1976) conflict management styles. He showed that conflicts could be managed by focusing an interpersonal relationship or an organizational change. He further posited that specialists in organization development emphasize the human manipulation conflicts in organizations, (Macibi, 2007).

6.4 Gender and Conflict

Gender as opposed to sex is an all – encompassing concept that incorporates gives given and ascribed dimensions of masculine and feminine identity. This means that people can see gender as something they have, that is biological constitution as well as something people become through interaction with the social structures. Gender analysis addresses men's and women's respective roles and social relationships between men and women (Bushra and Lopez, (1993)

Conflict is a dynamic process which structures, attitudes and behaviors are constantly changing and influencing one another. A conflict emerges are parties interests come into conflict or the relationship they are in becomes oppressive. Conflict parties then begin to develop hostile attitudes and conflictual behavior. The conflict formation starts to grow and develop. As it does so, it may widen, draw in other parties deepen and spread, generating secondary conflict within the main parties or among outsiders who are sucked in. This often considerably complicates the task of addressing the original core conflict, which may involve the escalation of conflict behavior, change in attitudes and transformation of relationship or structures.

Conflict involves stress and anxiety. It produces negative interpersonal attitudes and perceptions; it reduces the cohesion in a group; it causes financial; social, emotional and even physical loses and injuries to both the parties in dispute as well as to non – parties in dispute groups.

This is evidenced by the 2007 pat Election Violence (PEV) in Kenya when the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) and the Party of National Unity (PNU) went into power wrangling.

Wisinki (1993) explains the term conflict as a disagreement, disagreement, or disharmony that occurs in groups when differences regarding ideas, methods and members are expressed. These differences however do not have to result a negative outcome. When used properly, the differences can make members of a group become closure and more aware of each other, the members of a group can combine ideas and be more successful in the end.

Gender and conflict implies that those two fields of interest are connected. Understanding their relationship conflict can also be perceived as an opportunity to change power structures in a positive way if the conflict is managed well and as a destructive force if not properly managed. Thus, gender analysis of conflict can contribute to understanding prospects for peace. Therefore, an analysis of conflict process is needed that incorporates gender approaches and offers insight in power, control and competition (Bushra and Lopez, 1993).

Some scholars however are convinced that in a culture with historic divisions along gender lines, conflicts can "neither be understood nor resolved without consideration of their contexts……… gender among others is an important characteristic of contexts in which status relations and values are negotiated ", (Taylor and Miller, 1994).

Again Sherly D. Brahnam et al, (2005), in their study on a gender based categorization for conflict resolution examined the moderating role of gender on the relation between interpersonal conflicts and job negative well-beings than men. In their study, female were reported more cases in interpersonal conflicts and higher level of distress towards their job than male. In addition gender differences on the tendency and the effects of conflicts handling styles were reported, in which men were found to be suitable in suing dominating coping tactics, with cooperating strategies, which were found to be suitable for women, (Sheryl D. Brahnam, 2005).

VII.   Research Methodology

The study adopted descriptive research design to determine the conflict management styles of academic staff of selected primary schools in Samburu division, Kwalecounty. Research population comprised of 23 primary schools and had the population of 340 teachers. In addition, there were 171 male and 169 female respondents. The researcher used Solvins formula to get the sample size of 184 respondents. The study used simple random in school population, whereas systematic sampling was used in selecting schools at equal intervals from the list of schools in the division. A standardized questionnaire was used to collect data. Data was analyzed by the use of frequencies, percentages, the student's sample t-test and Fisher's one-way analysis of variance.

VIII.   Research Finding

8.1. Forms of Conflict Management

8.2. Types of Conflict Management styles Utilized by Academic Staff

Table 2: Types of Conflict Management Styles Utilized By Academic Staff

Conflict management style	Items	Mean	Interpretation	Rank
Smoothing (Compromising)	I try to accommodate the wishes of my peers and colleagues	2.10	Agree	6
	I compromise in order to reach solutions	2.19	Agree	
	I attempt to meet the expectation of others	2.09	Agree	7
	I put forward middle positions in efforts to break dead locks	2.07	Agree	8
	I seek to bring everyone's concerns out into the open in order to resolve disputes in the possible way.	1.95	Agree	10
	I trade important information with others so that problems can be solved.	1.81	Agree	11
	I accept the recommendations of colleagues, peers and coworkers	1.77	Agree	12
	I try to each compromise through negotiation	1.66	Strongly Agree	14
	I seek to investigate issues with others in order to find solutions that are mutually acceptable	1.58	Strongly Agree	15
Avoiding	**I avoid hard feelings by keeping my disagreements with others to my self**	**2.48**	**Agree**	**2**
	I try to avoid being singled out, keeping conflict with others to myself	2.13	Agree	5
	I avoid discussing differences with others.	2.66	Disagree	1
Forcing	I uphold my solutions to problems	2.35	Agree	3
	I argue my case with peers, colleagues and co-workers to demonstrate the merits of the position I take.	1.96	Agree	9
	I am firm in resolving when it comes to defending my side of the issues	1.75	Strongly Agree	13

Results in Table 2 indicate that most teachers in the sample always utilize a smoothing style of conflict management. This is because most teachers agreed with most of the items in Table 2, which corresponds with a smoothing style on the rating scale. For example most teachers agreed and rated themselves as majority utilizing a smoothing conflict management style regarding the following items; I avoid hard feelings by keeping my disagreements with others to myself (mean = 2.48); I compromise in order to reach solutions (mean = 2.19); I try to avoid being singled out, keeping conflict with others to myself (mean = 2.13) and so on. To get an overall picture on how teachers ranked their conflict management styles, an average was computed for all the 15 items in Table 2, which came out to be 2.04, corresponding with a smoothing style on the ranking scale.

This confirms that on average the academic staffs in the sampled schools generally utilize a smoothing conflict management style.

These results imply that most teachers in the sample emphasize the areas of agreement and common goals and de-emphasize areas with potency for disagreements. The fact that most teachers are in their middle and late adulthood, explains why most of them always prefer agreeing on issues than conflicting or disagreeing to them. However, academic staff of different demographic characteristics in the District under more study utilizes smoothing conflict management style. They emphasize on agreements rather than disagreements and are highly concerned with common goals compared to individual goals compared to individual goals. They are geared towards the achievement of harmony, which implies that they compromise during a conflict management styles utilized by academic staff of Kinango District in relation to age, gender, marital status, education qualification, religion and years of working experience. Amos Drory and Ilana Ritova (1997) whose results of their study suggested that inexperienced subjects did not change their choice of using the different conflict management styles in view of their opponent's power supported these findings. Again Britta K. Morris Rothschild and Maria R. Brassard, (2006) found that years of teaching had positive, significant effects on the use of compromising strategies.

8.3 Differences in the Types of Conflict Management styles according to gender.

The third and last objective in this study was to establish whether there is a significant difference in conflict management styles utilized by the academic staff in primary schools of Kinango District Kenya, for which the researcher hypothesized that conflict management styles do not significantly differ according to teacher's demographic characteristics. To test this null hypothesis, two comparative statistical tools were used, one being the student's Samples t-test and the Fisher's One Way Analysis of variance (ANOVA) as was deemed necessary. Results of this test are indicated in Table 3.

Table 3: Significant Difference in Conflict Management Styles According to Gender and Marital Status of Academic Staff

Variable	Gender	Mean	t-value	Sig.	Interpretation	Decision on Ho
Conflicting Mgt Styles Vs Gender	Male	2.00	- 1.30	.192	No significant difference	Accepted
	Female	2.08				

Results in Table 3 indicate that there is no significant difference in conflict management styles utilized by male and female academic staff in Kinango District Kenya (t= - 1.310, sig. =0.192).

However men are more likely to utilize a smoothing style as compared to women (mean for male <mean female). These results indicate that women although are smoothing in conflict management style, they utilize it at a smaller scale as compared to male academic staff. This implies that men are more likely to compromise while women staffs are less likely to compromise during a conflict situation.

However, Neil Brewer Patricia Mitchell, Nathan Weber (2002) opined that masculine individual were highest on the dominating conflict style. However, Berry man Fink, Cynthia, Brunner, Claire C. (1987) found males more likely than females to use a completing style, while females were more likely than males to use a comprising style. Due to the findings of the previous researchers, the researcher can conclude that regardless of their demographic characteristics the academic staffs either use smoothing, avoiding and forcing style of conflict management in handling conflict situation.

IX. Conclusion

Academic Staff of different demographic characteristics in the District under study utilize smoothing conflict management style. They emphasize on agreements rather than disagreements and are highly concerned with common goals compared to individual goals. They are geared towards the achievement of harmony, which implies that they compromise during a conflict situation. Thus, there is no significant different in conflict management styles utilized by academic staff of kinango Sub-county in relation to age, gender, marital status, Education qualification, religion and years of working experience. Amos Drory and LlanaRitova (1997) whose results of their study suggested that inexperience subjects did not change their choice of using the different conflict management styles in view of their opponent's power supported these findings. Again Britta K. Moris Rothschild and Marla R. Brassard, (2006) found that years of teaching had positive, significant effects on the use of compromising strategies. However, Neil Brewer, Patricia Mitchel, Nathan Weber (2002) opined that masculine individual were highest on the dominating conflict management style where as feminine individuals were highest on the avoiding style. However, Berry man Fink, Cynthia, Brunner, Claire C. (1987) found male more likely than female to use a competing style, while female were more likely than male to use a compromising style. Due to the findings of the previous researchers, the researcher can conclude that regardless of their demographic characteristics the academic staffs either use smoothing, avoiding and forcing style of conflict management in handling conflict situation.

Because of the findings, the researcher recommends that, primary school administrators may use smoothing, competitive, collaborating, avoiding, and compromising as a means of intervention in conflict management since they have all been found effective. However, the use of force as a means of resolving conflict should be a last resort since it has been found to be the least effective. Kamla Raj supported these recommendations. (2008), whose study found that there is no significant difference among Academic Staff in their perception of the above styles of Conflict Management.

X.   Recommendation

a)   Researcher recommends further investigations to determine the teaching experience and the conflict management styles of academic staff as the study revealed no significant difference of work experience in conflict management.

b)   Because of the findings, primary school administrators may use smoothing, competitive, collaborating, avoiding and compromising as a means of intervention in conflict management 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.

c)   There is an urgent need to expand the curriculum of the primary school education to include contents on conflict management styles to empower the conflict management behavior of primary school teachers.

d)   The researcher finally recommends that the Kenyan government under the Ministry of Education to enhance the conflict management behavior of all academic stakeholders introduce trainings on conflict management styles.

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