

Workplace Conflict in the Penitentiary Administration: The Case of Buea Central Prison

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Abstract:- Conflict is an inherent and ubiquitous aspect of organizational dynamics, rendering its effective management an indispensable component of a manager's role. Workplace conflicts have been on the rise most especially amongst staff in the penitentiary sector. Thus, this research aims to examine the effects of workplace conflict on staff performance and to assess the steps in managing workplace conflict in Buea central prison. The paper is guided by the Attribution Theory. The paper adopts a qualitative research approach with the use of interview guide for data collection. Using a cluster sampling technique, a total of 20 respondents were randomly selected to participate in the research, mainly from the penitentiary sector at the Buea Central Prison. Findings from this study reveal that workplace conflict has deleterious effects on the penitentiary environment, including heightened insecurity and tension, increased absenteeism, and abandonment of duty. Conversely, the study highlights the importance of effective conflict management strategies, including promoting open communication, acknowledging conflict issues, maintaining transparency, and establishing organizational guidelines. Ultimately, this research underscores the inevitability of conflict in organizational settings, stemming from divergent opinions, interests, and needs among employees. By acknowledging conflict as an inherent aspect of human nature, organizations can proactively develop effective management strategies, thereby transforming conflict into a constructive force that fosters growth and improvement.

Keywords:- Workplace, Conflict, Penitentiary Administration and Buea Central Prison.

I. INTRODUCTION

Conflict is an inherent and inevitable aspect of organizational life, occurring in every organization and team striving to achieve its goals (Mary, 2010). While differences and conflicts are unavoidable, they can provide opportunities for growth, creativity, and improvement (Mary, 2010; Patrick, 2018). Effective conflict management can transform conflicts into constructive forces, fostering greater understanding, creativity, and productivity (Patrick, 2018).

However, unmanaged conflicts can have severe consequences, including decreased motivation, staff satisfaction, and productivity (Neil, 2009). In fact, conflict is considered one of the most personal and expensive problems in the workplace (Neil, 2009). Therefore, empowering managers and employees to manage conflicts effectively is crucial for creating a harmonious work environment and improving organizational outcomes.

In the context of the prison sector, research has shown that prison officers are particularly vulnerable to job-related stressors and strains (Gail et al., 2015). The working conditions in prisons, including high demands, time pressures, and lack of resources, can contribute to stress and conflict among prison officers (Frank & Hayden, 2017). Furthermore, intrinsic job stressors, such as overcrowding, understaffing, and aggression from prisoners, can also take a toll on prison officers' well-being (Frank & Hayden, 2017).

In conclusion, conflict is an inevitable aspect of organizational life, and its effective management is crucial for promoting a harmonious work environment and improving organizational outcomes. By acknowledging the complexities of conflict and developing effective management strategies, organizations can transform conflicts into opportunities for growth, creativity, and improvement.

Since the year 1992, there have been some serious problems in the Penitentiary Administration manifested by the personnel and inmates of that institution who are the main actors. Despite the Presidential Decree No 2010/365 of 29th November 2010; bearing the special status of civil servants of the Penitentiary Administration, the cases of indiscipline amongst personnel and amongst inmates is increasing that is when staff are programmed to carry out a common task (taking guard, escorting inmates to work gangs and carrying out some administrative duties together), they end up quarrelling or fighting because of common interest. On the other hand inmates are frequently involved in rioting, fighting, mutiny and at times escaping from prison custody. The increases rate of stress-related illnesses that are registered by staff of the prison, the increase rate of unjustified absenteeism, some staff have even abandon their jobs in

search for other jobs elsewhere. Also there are frequent complaints from visitors and collaborators from other services about the poor quality of service rendered by the personnel. Most often when personnel are been punished for their respective acts of indiscipline, they turn to attribute it to the fact that the senior staff does not like them or at times they say because they are not of the same promotion, village or tribe with the senior staff. Also due to the persistent increase of the population of inmates in the various prisons in Cameroon, there is an increase rate of promiscuity, introduction of prohibited items and inmates attempting to escape from custody which is constantly combatted by the personnel thus creating workload to the staff. More so, when some personnel are appointed to post of responsibilities or promoted to higher positions, others attribute it to be that they are been chosen by their relatives who are present in decision making positions. There is also a serious problem of role conflict amongst staff and senior authorities of the penitentiary administration that is because of common or personal interest, some staff enters into the role or activities of other staffs and takes decision thus creating a conflicting atmosphere in the service. Considering the fact that staff are the main actors in the prison setting and that the prison is a sensitive institution of the state where there is supposed to be high level of security and no tension for her objectives to be attained. The presence of conflict amongst staff will go a long way to hinder the smooth functioning of the prison system there by creating an insecure environment and tension for work.

II. REVIEWING OF RELATED LITERATURE

According to Rabia et al (2020), Employee productivity is a critical concern for organizations, particularly in the education sector. This study examines the relationship between workplace conflicts and employee productivity, with a focus on the mediating role of workplace politics. A stratified sampling technique was employed to collect data from 325 faculty members at general public universities in Rural Sindh. The response rate was 61.23%. The findings indicate a negative relationship between workplace conflicts and employee productivity, with workplace politics significantly mediating this relationship. The study's results have implications for organizational managers and policymakers seeking to promote a positive work environment and enhance employee productivity (Rabia et al., 2020). The weakness in this study is that the sample size was many and the method of sampling that was used made the response rate not to be 100%. A research carried out by Isaac et al (2015), states that This study examines the relationships among conflict management, communication, and relationships at work in the context of plastic manufacturing companies in Ghana. Using a purposive sampling technique, data was

collected from 150 employees of Interplast Company Limited and Duraplast Company Limited. The findings suggest that effective conflict management, facilitated by open communication channels, fosters trust and improves relationships among employees. The study's results have implications for organizational managers and policymakers seeking to promote positive work environments and enhance employee relationships.

Conflicts in organizations arise when individual or group interests and activities clash, hindering the attainment of objectives. Poorly managed conflicts can lead to employee grievances, negatively impacting relationships and organizational performance. This study investigates the relationships among conflict management, communication, and relationships at work in the plastic manufacturing industry in Ghana.

This study employed a purposive sampling technique to select 150 employees from Interplast Company Limited and Duraplast Company Limited, the two largest plastic manufacturing companies in Ghana. Data was collected using a structured questionnaire.

The findings indicate a positive relationship between conflict management and relationships at work, moderated by effective communication. The results suggest that when conflicts are properly managed using open communication channels, trust and positive relationships among employees are fostered.

The study's findings support the assertion that effective conflict management, facilitated by open communication channels, is crucial for promoting positive relationships among employees. The results have implications for organizational managers and policymakers seeking to promote positive work environments and enhance employee relationships.

This study contributes to our understanding of the relationships among conflict management, communication, and relationships at work. The findings highlight the importance of effective conflict management and open communication channels in fostering trust and positive relationships among employees. The study's results have practical implications for organizational managers and policymakers seeking to promote positive work environments and enhance employee relationships.

In a research carried out by Kagwiria (2015), Organizations are dynamic systems that inevitably experience conflict. Human resource managers in the telecommunication industry in Kenya face numerous challenges in resolving conflicts among employees. This study aims to investigate the influence of workplace conflict management strategies on organizational performance in the telecommunication industry in Kenya.

This study employed a quantitative research approach to investigate the influence of workplace conflict management strategies on organizational performance. A survey questionnaire was administered to a sample of employees in the telecommunication industry in Kenya.

The findings of this study reveal a positive and significant relationship between third-party intervention, communication, negotiation, and compromise strategies and organizational performance.

The study's findings suggest that effective conflict management strategies are crucial for improving organizational performance. Third-party intervention, in particular, can be an effective means of resolving conflicts and improving organizational performance.

This study contributes to our understanding of the influence of workplace conflict management strategies on organizational performance in the telecommunication industry in Kenya. The findings highlight the importance of effective conflict management strategies, particularly third-party intervention, in improving organizational performance. The study's results have practical implications for human resource managers and organizational leaders seeking to improve conflict management and organizational performance.

Dana (2001), examines the stress and effects thereof on the correctional officer and worker in some of America's high security prisons. As we all know, prison is a community of violence subjugated behind the walls of various correctional institutions around the country. Through manipulation and violence, criminal offenders try to make their stay in many of America's High Security prisons more congenial. With a blatant disregard for the correctional worker and correctional officer, the violence, confrontation and belligerence exerted by the inmate population ultimately affects the daily work and personal lives of these dedicated and basically unknown law enforcement professionals, known as correctional officers and workers. This study was only limited to high security prisons in America thus the result cannot be applied to other correctional institution especially those of developing countries. According to Awan (2014), This study undertakes a comprehensive examination of conflict situations and their underlying causes within organizational settings, with a particular focus on identifying viable solutions to improve the working environment and, by extension, organizational performance. In societies characterized by diverse interests, views, and values, conflicts are an inevitable outcome of the interactions between individuals and groups with differing goals and interests. Our research findings suggest that unmanaged conflicts can have far-reaching and deleterious consequences for organizations, including decreased employee satisfaction,

insubordination, reduced productivity, economic losses, fragmentation, and poor performance. Furthermore, our study reveals that conflicts stem from incompatibilities between individual and group goals and interests, and if left unchecked, can ultimately destroy the organization. Therefore, we propose that management adopt proactive and effective conflict management strategies that facilitate open communication, foster interpersonal relationships among coworkers, and boost employee morale, ultimately leading to improved organizational performance and a more positive and productive work environment (Awan, 2014). They fail to study on issues concerning this penitentiary.

III. THEORY APPLICABILITY

This theory was propounded by the Austrian Sociologist Fritz Heider in the year 1958. This theory postulates that, conflict arises due to the result of action that can be felt on two sets of conditions. One is the factors within the employee or the employer and the other is the factors within the workplace.

Attribution theory is a psychological framework that seeks to understand how individuals interpret and assign meaning to events, and how these interpretations influence their cognitive processes and behavioral responses. By examining the causal attributions that individuals make about events, attribution theory provides insight into the underlying thought patterns and motivations that drive human behavior, and sheds light on the complex relationships between perception, cognition, and action thus intrapersonal conflict (Lewis & Daltory, 1990).

Shaver (2016) illustrated that, The attribution process is a ubiquitous and automatic cognitive mechanism that enables individuals to make sense of their own behaviors and outcomes, as well as those of others, with the ultimate goal of adapting to changing environments and overcoming daily challenges. For instance, when a nurse observes a colleague performing a procedure incorrectly, they are likely to form an attributional explanation, such as attributing the behavior to insufficient skills or training. Similarly, individuals also form attributions for their own behaviors and outcomes, as exemplified by a physician attributing their success in diagnosing a rare disease to their intelligence, training, or luck. This process of forming causal attributions is a fundamental aspect of human cognition, occurring numerous times throughout the day, often without conscious awareness. According to Shaver (2016), research has consistently demonstrated that the formation of causal attributions plays a vital role in facilitating learning, adaptation, and personal growth, as it enables individuals to identify the causes of desirable and undesirable outcomes, and adjust their behaviors accordingly, thereby promoting resilience and success in the face of challenges.

According to attribution theory, conflict can arise in the workplace through various manifestations, often stemming from the cognitive biases and assumptions that individuals make about the actions and outcomes of others. For instance, when an individual receives a promotion, their colleagues may attribute the promotion to favoritism by management, rather than recognizing the individual's experience and skills as the primary reason for their advancement. This attributional bias can lead to feelings of resentment, jealousy, and conflict among colleagues, as they may perceive the promotion as unfair or undeserved. Furthermore, such negative attributions can create a toxic work environment, characterized by mistrust, gossip, and decreased morale, ultimately hindering organizational performance and productivity. For example, at the central prison, when a person is promoted, the people left behind attribute it to connection instead of attributing it to his or her work ability and professionalism (Lewis & Daltory, 1990). In the penitentiary, when some personnel are promoted to higher rank or appointed to superior positions, other personnel attribute their promotion to the fact that they are related to the high ranking authorities. Some always attribute their failure to the fact that superior don't like them.

IV. METHODOLOGY

The article employed the quantitative research approach with use of interview guide for data collection. Data was collected from 20 staff of the Buea Central Prison (BCP) found in the Fako division, South West Region of Cameroon. A cluster sampling technique was used to select the required target population for this paper. Data collected from the field was analysed using thematic as themes were developed from the responses of the respondents.

V. MAJOR FINDINGS

Findings indicate that the causes of workplace conflict in the Penitentiary especially in the BCP ranges from: Workload, Role conflict, Unpredictable policies, Stress, Poor communication, Leadership style and Differing goals and or views. A growing body of research challenges the conventional wisdom that workplace conflict is primarily driven by interpersonal dynamics and individual behavior, instead suggesting that a significant proportion of organizational conflict is rooted in systemic and environmental factors inherent to the workplace. This assertion is supported by Sandy (2008), who posits that The emergence of conflict in the workplace can often be attributed to the imposition of excessive or unrealistic work demands, which can have a profound impact on employee well-being and job satisfaction. When employees are subjected to unsustainable workloads, they may experience feelings of underappreciation,

overwork, and burnout, ultimately leading to decreased morale, increased stress, and a heightened likelihood of conflict with colleagues and management. Furthermore, the pressure to meet unrealistic expectations can foster a culture of competition and resentment, rather than collaboration and cooperation, thereby exacerbating the conflict and undermining the overall effectiveness of the organization. Furthermore, Carlos (2008) corroborates this finding by highlighting the leadership style adopted by organizational leaders plays a significant role in shaping the conflict dynamics within the workplace. Specifically, the diverse range of leadership styles, spanning from empowering and participative to autocratic and dictatorial, can create complexities and challenges for team members who must navigate and adapt to different leadership approaches. The imposition of a dictatorial leadership style, for instance, can foster a culture of fear, mistrust, and resentment, leading to increased conflict and decreased collaboration among team members. Conversely, an empowering leadership style can promote a culture of openness, trust, and respect, thereby mitigating the likelihood of conflict and fostering a more positive and productive work environment. Ultimately, the leadership style adopted by organizational leaders can have a profound impact on the conflict dynamics within the workplace, highlighting the need for leaders to adopt a style that promotes collaboration, trust, and respect among team members. These findings collectively underscore the need for organizations to address the systemic and environmental factors that contribute to workplace conflict, rather than simply attributing it to individual personalities or behaviors.

Effects of workplace conflict on staff performance showed that work place conflict have significant effects on workers performance in the central prison in the Buea municipality. Some of the effects are: insecurity and tension in the penitentiary, absenteeism which reduces workers performance, abandoned of duty, development of streamline policies and procedures which may results to job satisfaction, enhance creativity and good conflict management skills.

Conflict within the workplace can have a dual impact on employees, yielding both detrimental and beneficial effects. Findings revealed that measures such as: promoting effective communication in an organisation, acknowledging the problem the resulted to conflict, keeping communication open to all parties, establishing guidelines in an organisation, not acting out of emotion and bringing swift and just resolutions are good strategy to reduce work place conflict and to promote workers performance. Consistent with the perspective of Turner and Weed (1983), these findings suggest that in conflict situations, managers should eschew the tendency to attribute interpersonal conflicts to personality clashes, as

this approach can serve as a convenient excuse to avoid addressing the underlying causes of conflict. Instead, managers should strive to recognize the signs of conflict behaviors and address them in a direct and forthright manner. By reframing conflicts as opportunities for growth and improvement, rather than as problems to be eliminated or ignored, managers can foster a more productive and efficient work environment. This approach enables managers to leverage conflicts as catalysts for refining departmental policies and operations, ultimately leading to enhanced organizational performance and a more effective workforce.

VI. CONCLUSION

Conflict resolutions can be employed by organisation to reduce conflicts in the central prison: Promoting effective communication in an organisation, Acknowledging the problem the resulted to conflict, Keeping communication open to all parties, Establishing guidelines in an organisation, Not acting out of emotion and bringing swift and just resolutions are good strategy to reduce work place conflict and to promote workers performance.

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