

Conflict Resolution as an Imperative for Organizational Growth: An Analytical Perspective

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Abstract: This paper preoccupies itself with the affirmation that conflict is necessarily symptomatic of organizational growth and development. A vast number of scholars have thrown weight behind the issue under discourse with divergent perspectives. Some, in no small measure, discountenanced the position that conflict is positively correlated with the smooth functionality of an organization, while others are averse with the fact that, organizational progress is inextricably imbued with conflict.

A critical assessment method and analysis of existing literature were used to examine the invaluable import of conflict to organizations, which aims at strengthening the economy of a nation, as it is inherently shrouded in human nature.

The study evaluates the various wellsprings of conflict as well as its philosophical underpinnings with the aim of showering the expected vitality on organizational growth. The paper argues that conflict is functional and therapeutic to organizations in contradistinction to the postulation of some authors who hold tenaciously to the view that, conflict is absolutely dysfunctional and should be circumvented or, at best, skirted in any organization.

On the whole, the paper unearths that, it was a dearth of requisite intellectual prowess and moral mores to conclude that conflict is replete with retrogressive tendencies in organizations or has a finger in the pie of organizational perdition. It is not unsafe to aver that, this belief system is a revolting, repugnant and repulsive crudity. The paper recommended that all organizations should embrace conflict as a necessary catalyst for organizations to attain their objectives and mandate.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Conflict is indispensable to human existence. The daily activities among individuals, groups, organizations, nations in a bid to meet the set objectives usually breed incompatibility or inconsistency of interest. The bane of the incompatibility is, in most cases, paucity of resources for which they have similar penchant; or when they have diverse attitude, values, belief system, and set skills. "Conflict is the perception of differences of interests among people" (Thompson, 1998). Conflict can also be defined as a process of social interaction involving a struggle over claims to resources, power and status, belief and other preferences and desires. The aims of

the parties in conflict may extend from simply attempting to gain acceptance of a preference, or securing a resource advantage, to the extreme of injuring or eliminating opponents. (Bisno, 1988).

The theme of conflict is implicit in human nature and has greatly shaped our thinking over time. Over the years, the issues revolving around conflict have gained astounding interest within the compass of historians, the novelists, the philosophers, and the theologians.

In recent years, there has been a resurgence of interest and valued changes in the study of conflict in social and

organizational milieu. The founding of the International Association for Conflict Management and Conflict Management Division of the Academy of Management to exhort research, teaching, and training and development on managing social and organizational conflict and the publication of the International Journal of Conflict Management authenticate this rekindled interest.

II. DEFINITION OF CONFLICT

The term “conflict” is not possessive of a univocal definition. The greater part of the definitional befuddlement was orchestrated by Scholars in divergent disciplines who took resurgent relish in studying conflict. Methodical reviews of the conflict literature by Fink (1968), Tedeschi, Schlenker, and Bonoma (1973), and Thomas (1976, 1992) indicate a conceptual consideration for, but little unanimous endorsement of, any generally acceptable definition of conflict. Fink

(1968), in his classical review, has illustrated considerable variance in conflict definitions. He discovered a lot of definitions for specific interests and various general definitions that endeavour to be all-embracing.

In the organizational milieu, March and Simon (1958), decry conflict as a breakdown in the standard measure for decision-making, in such a way that individual or group is faced with acute difficulty in selecting an alternative. This is a minute conceptualization of conflict and is not very useful for research purposes, as it is dysfunctional to the change and progress of an organization. On a wider scope, Pondy (1967) has argued that organizational conflict can best be understood as a dynamic process implicit in organizational behaviour. This is a broad definition of conflict that is dispensed with little or nothing transpiring in an individual or a group. Tedeschi et al. (1973) assume a middle stance, defining conflict as “an interactive state in which the behaviour or goals of one actor are to some extent incompatible or incongruous with the behaviour or goals of some other actor or actors”. It is decipherable from their espousal that “actor” refers to any social entity, from the individual to the corporate body itself. Smith (1966) holds a homogenous view and defines conflict as “a situation in which the conditions, practices, or goals for different participants are inherently incompatible” (p. 511). Conflict was equally defined as a “type of behaviour which occurs when two or more parties are in contrariety or in battle as a consequence of a perceived relative deprivation from the activities of or interacting with another person or group” (Litterer, 1966).

The gulf between the last two authors in defining conflict is that, whereas Smith sees conflict as a situation, Litterer sees it as a type of behaviour. However, both of these authors and Tedeschi et al. consider conflict as an offshoot of incompatibility or opposition in goals, activities, or interaction among the social entities.

III. ORGANIZATIONAL CONFLICT

It is a manifest fact that conflict is importantly elemental to social concept, which, in no small measure, provides an elbowroom and springboard for this study to dive into organizational conflict. Conflict is implicitly and indubitably one of the major organizational bric-a-brac of events which determine the viability or otherwise of any organization. Pondy (1967) firmly opined that, any organization theory which is averse to conflict stands the risk of epileptic guide in optimally handling challenges of organizational stability, efficiency, governance, change and progress. This is simply because, conflict within and between organizations is intertwiningly akin to cause, effect, or symptom, to each of the challenges. Baron (1990) tenaciously observed that “organizational conflict is a basic task for both managers and scientists who keenly relish the frontiers of their knowledge in the nature of organizational behaviour and organizational processes.

Albeit, a number of theorists have descried outrageous organizational conflict as an anathema to organization, while others have underscored operations of conflict as a necessary groundbreaker and pep for organizational processes, like activation and motivation, feedback and control, power balance, formation growth, and also the institutions for channeling and resolving disputes, from which organizations thrive exponentially. It is not in contest that these functions and dysfunctions unearth both the nucleus of conflict in organizational life and the intricacies linked with its management.

Deducible from the above, organizational conflict is viewed simply as not illegitimate and unavoidable and a positive signal of optimal organizational management. Conflict is now recognized as emblematic of high organizational productivity, especially if it is not overblown. The reign of little or non-existence of conflict in organizations may culminate in organizational inertia, infertile decisions, ineffectiveness, low income generation, inability to maximize shareholders’ wealth and eventual insolvency and bankruptcy. Therefore, conflict is positively correlated to organizational wellbeing and vibrancy.

IV. INTERDISCIPLINARY CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE STUDY OF CONFLICT

➤ *Philosophy*

- *Plato and Aristotle*

It is an incontrovertible fact that both Philosophers failed to write a special treatise on social conflict; they merely discussed root and branch on the imperativeness of order in a society.

Plato was of the view that tension within society is basically natural, and therefore some conflict is inevitable.” In spite of that, he felt that if an adequate equilibrium of the parts could be attained, social conflict would be at its critical low ebb. Each segment of society must know the part it must play and be guided in such a way that all segments work together in harmony”(Schellenberg, 1996). Plato suggested that such a balance of the parts could be obtained if and only if there is a reign of appropriate leadership.

In *The Republic*, Plato suggested that the needs of the society could be satisfied if private property/ownership was totally obliterated in our society. He further maintained that the satisfaction of societal needs primarily hinges on the elimination of private property, especially for those who would be the occupiers of political seats. Plato believed that pursuance of private interest by the political leaders would definitely be an anathema to the quality delivery of their jobs.

Aristotle, albeit, submitted that Plato’s philosophy called for “extreme unification” or communism and in no scruple, insisted that this is a bunch of impossibility and impracticability. This does not preclude the fact that Aristotle discovered an avalanche of utilities in social conflict. Contrariwise, even though he was averse to Plato on the form of government, he gave his nod to Plato’s intellectual accord for the need of order in the state. Plato and Aristotle underscored that an absence of conflict is a sine qua non for the attainment of the just form of life in the city-state (Polis). To them, “strife is an emblem of imperfection and unhappiness. Order signals the good life while disorder the opposite. Conflict is a threat to the success of the state and should be in utter abatement, and even exterminated completely, if feasible” (Sipka, 1969). Classical philosophers, such as Plato and Aristotle, designated social conflict to pathological position.

- *Thomas Hobbes and John Locke*

Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) and John Locke (1632-1704) propounded social contract theories in the seventeenth-century and posited that the gist of government is to establish order in social relations, without which there would be incessant violence among human beings. Hobbes sees “human beings as egoistic, the slaves of sin, the dupes of error, and of fear persons are their own enemies or the enemies of others” (Lourenco & Glidewell, 1975). He took the position that the sovereign, that is, (a monarch, who is granted absolute and permanent power to control social conflict) should control human beings. The decisions of the Sovereign are automatically a concomitant of law, which must by every means of manner be hearkened to by all the citizens. This is made possible by the authority and power bequeathed to him, and notably, the major potent avenue to actively control social conflict.

Locke’s stance was not attuned with that of Hobbes’s disposition for political order and harmony, that is, Leviathan

that was equipped with absolute control. To Locke, government is to be organized by the people through their normal and unanimous consent, while its duty was the preservation of lives, liberties, and estates. Nevertheless, Locke was in utter contest with Hobbes on the types of government he deemed apt, and conclusively resolved that government should be burdened with effective conflict control.

- *G.W.F. Hegel and Karl Marx*

There was a paradigm shift on the divergent vistas of conflict in philosophy during the nineteenth century. It is a manifest fact that the mishmash of philosophical inputs tied to a functional version of conflict, because of the sparse scope of this study. Nonetheless, it is of immense import to delve into survey of works of men of mental acuties, such as G. W. F Hegel (1770-1831) and Karl Marx (1818-1883).

Hegel’s philosophy takes preponderance over the view of dialectics, which has developed four various meanings over the years; first, arriving at the truth, second, dialogue or debate, three, process of ascertaining the unrestricted truth, and four, process of change through the conflict of opposing forces (Reese,1982). Hegel’s dialectic avers that every finite concept (*thesis*) is implicit in its own contrariety (*antithesis*). Therefore, surpassing the contrariety necessarily requires existence of amity between the thesis and antithesis, which undoubtedly culminates in (*synthesis*). The dialectical method, thusly puts synthesis of opposites into pivot, which in turn transmutes to new thesis, this process lingers up to the moment it was fully developed into another synthesis (the Absolute Idea) which is the pinnacle of the transformation process.

It is not imbecilic to underscore that there is a lucid gulf between the dialectic of Marx and Hegel, as it is evident in Marx’s view that human history is incontrovertibly replete with conflict between two different classes, that is, bourgeoisie (controllers of economy) and proletariat (labourers). This is a catalyst for change and development. To Marx, the capitalists must relinquish their power through the instrument of revolution. Both Karl Marx and Engel, were so vehement on this class struggle. The gist of their Communist Manifesto, with which they closed it, is no other thing other than the declaration that their goal can be achieved by forcible removal of all existing social conditions. Let the ruling class tremble at a Communist revolution. The working class have nothing to lose save for their chains. Class conflict is the key to Marx’s dialectic, which is deeply founded on economic stratifications. Marx holds tenaciously to the belief that this class strife between the rich and the poor would, in no small measure, snowball into a classless society dispense with repression where human beings are, for the very first time, veraciously attain their latitude. This new society would be in dearth of conflict and relative peace and harmony would be restored among individuals.

- *John Dewey*

One of the notable philosophers who made fecund contributions to social conflict in the twentieth century is John Dewey. He was optimally influenced by Hegel's dialectic process and Darwin's theory of evolution. In congruence with Dewey's view (1922-1957), "Conflict is the gadfly to thoughts. It impels us to memory and observation. It gives us impulse to invention. It shocks us out to sheep-like passivity, and sets us at noting and contriving" He patently observed that when the relationship between human beings and environment is distorted by conflict or bump in the road, people must, as a matter of fact, utilize their mental acuity to reacclimatize to the environment via a change in their usual pattern of mannerism and system of belief. Putting it rightly, it is not unapt to say that, conflict should be properly x-rayed in order to fathom possible remedial actions and opt for the most effective and pragmatic one among them.

- *Biological Science*

- *Charles Darwin*

Charles Darwin (1809-1882), a naturalist, propounded the "theory of organic evolution," which basically signals the fact that biological species survive and grow through confrontation of the environmental challenges. He depicted that "all nature is at war, one organism with one another, or with external nature. Considering the contented art of nature, this may be subjected to skepticism in the first place; nonetheless, reflection and traces will unavoidably prove its truth-value, (Hyman 1966). This has necessitated the reassessment of the classical views of the role of social conflict in human development. Darwin (1871) and his followers –the social Darwinists, place high premium on the role that environmental conflict plays in human growth, which culminated to the development of the doctrine of "the survival of the fittest" posited by Darwin.

Darwin conceived the notion that the growth of human beings is a function of their reaction to conflict with the environment. If conflict were absolutely not featuring in human affairs, which the classical philosophy embrace as the best thing so far, the ascendancy and crescendo of man would be ,by every means, retrogressed. The emphasis on evolution as the pivotal role of conflict in human development is an idea that gained currency in the nineteenth century. Darwinian theory ensures that this permeated into all aspects of science.

- *Sociology*

- *Georg Simmel*

He was an outstanding sociologist, who immensely contributed to the study of the forms of conflict. He believed firmly that a reasonable portion of conflict is important for smooth-functioning of various groups, just like stability and order. He opined that in small groups such as the marital groups, "a certain amount of discord, inner divergence and

outer controversy, is organically tied up with very elements that ultimately hold the group together, it cannot be separated from the unity of the sociological structure" (Simmel, 1908-1955).

- *Elton Mayo*

The publication of Elton Mayo's (1933) and Talcott Parsons's (1949) works marked a remarkable abandon of the study of social conflict starting from the late 1930s. Human relation movement was an offshoot of Mayo's study, which stressed the need for cooperation to facilitate organizational effectiveness. His conception was that conflict was an evil and should be extenuated, and possibly exterminated through and through from the organizations.

- *Talcott Parsons*

Talcott Parsons (1949) propounded a structural-functional theory, which really had a great impact on social science thought in the wake of World War II. His theory revolves around the assumption that society is intrinsically stable, integrated, and functional, and, as a consequence, conflict is seen as abnormal, disruptive and dysfunctional. "His approach is in spade, an equilibrium approach and the dynamics of conflict are debased to the swerving level. All this emanates from Parsons's extraordinary, Hobbesian burden with the natural proclivity of men to hostility, duel, animosity and difficulty of controlling them adequately" (Sipka, 1969).

- *Lewis Coser*

It is not out of place to note that, during 1950s, a reasonable number of theorists (Mills, 1959; Dahrendorf, 1959; Bernard, 1957; Coser, 1956) presented positions which are antithetical to Parsons's analysis. Resultantly, the desire in the study of the social milieu of conflict began to grow. The publication of *The Functions of Social Conflict* by Lewis Coser (1956), which focused on the productive potential of conflict, had much to do with this renewal of interest, Coser (1956), demystified Simmel's article in a comprehensive detail.

V. HERACLITUS' CONSPECTUS ON CONFLICT

Heraclitus gained his astounding fame from his postulation that everything in the universe is incontrovertibly in a state of constant flux, this simply depicts that nature is unendingly changing and dynamic. No wonder why Stumpf (1988) concisely states that, Heraclitus is overly popular for his aphorism that, "all things are in the state of flux". For Heraclitus, nothing is in a state of inertia, remain static, permanent and unchanging in the cosmos, but everything is in the process of transmutation. In the same vein, he maintained that conflict and strife immerse themselves in perpetuity of change, as the world is inexorably composed of conflict, hubbub, and of opposites (Omorgbe, 1990).

Heraclitus bewrays those events which are imbued in malarkey, blather and disorderliness actually necessitated the anxiety and distress of men in the world. This signals that humanity cannot be divorced from both good and evil as two opposing necessities of life, and this, indeed reawakened the consciousness of man to hanker for an enduring peace. But Heraclitus sees this appetite or avidity of man as unneeded, because he holds firmly to the position that conflict is an indubitable microcosm of life and the kernel for change in itself. So, for him, conflict is functional, positive and contributive to human growth and development. Heraclitus does not only perceive of perpetual change, he also posits a world of perpetual conflict, strife, war and clash of opposites. This clash of opposites, for him, is not a catastrophic or chaotic one, but of order and harmony. It is therefore not unsafe to aver that conflict of opposites is the very nub of existence, as it is only through conflict or war that everything gains their existence. This conflict of opposites is not anathematic but supportive. This denotes that life evolved as a consequence of conflict and enjoys its perpetual succession. It is a well known fact that existence exhibits itself in antonyms, inter alia; life and death, good and evil, day and night, cold and hot, wet and dry, male and female, positive and negative, up and down, high and low, happiness and sadness. Hence, strife is the order of existence, which must surely remain unceasing, if beinghood must be valid, and its import guaranteed.

VI. TYPES OF CONFLICT

Organizational conflict can simply be categorized as *intraorganizational*, which connotes conflict within an organization) or *interorganizational*, that is, conflict between two or more organizations. Thorough demystification of the four ilks of conflict is done hereunder;

➤ *Intrapersonal Conflict*

This rubric of conflict is otherwise known as intraindividual or intrapsychic conflict. It comes into play when an organizational member is billed to carry out certain tasks and roles which are not in congruence with his or area of specialization, expertise, aims, interest, and values.

➤ *Interpersonal Conflict*

This can be termed as *dyadic* conflict. It is a conflict between two or more organizational members of the same or different hierarchical levels. The example of this type of conflict is the studies on superior versus subordinate conflict, Manager versus Employees and host of others.

➤ *Intragroup Conflict*

It is also epithet “intradepartmental conflict”, which is a conflict among members of a group or between two or more subgroups within a group in connection with its procedures, task, goals and much else. This rubric of conflict may also ensue in the wake of incompatibilities or disagreement between some or all the members of a group and its leader(s).

➤ *Intergroup Conflict*

This can be as well referred to as interdepartmental conflict. It is conflict between two or more units or groups within an organization. For instance, conflict between line and staff, production and marketing, strategic and tactical, tactical and operational and head office and field staff are typical examples of this class of conflict. The basic class of intergroup conflict is between labour and management.

It is to be noted that conflict grouped by sources can occur at the interpersonal, intergroup and intragroup levels. Similarly, incompatibilities caused by these sources can be seen in two individuals, a group, or two groups.

VII. CONCLUSION

We have unflinchingly exerted efforts through the pages of this paper to bewray Heraclitus’ conception of conflict of opposites and the fundamental condition of life essential for change and progress, as well as potpourri of views of some other scholars on conflict. It is not undecipherable from the prism and memorabilia of this academic exercise that containment and resolution of conflict is an utter summum bonum for organizational growth. Although, some scholars, as earlier pontificated in this paper, posited that conflict is dysfunctional and negatively correlated to organizations or any form of Institution, but conversely stating, this is seen as lightweight arguments, as the import of conflict is incontrovertibly spiraling in our daily commerce with people.

It must be noted however that, identification of conflict with nature dispense with any relation to an external foundation is fundamentally ungrounded. Heraclitus regarded man a warring animal by nature. If this were so, there would be no need to sue for peace and order in the human society. Synoptically, conflict is not necessarily connatural to man, but it is spawned by external factors.

It is not puerile to note that conflict is not only functional but also indispensable for organizational growth and development throughout the whole world. Conflict, if circumspectly managed, usually brings about exponential rise in social cohesion, economic growth, political stability, and much else, which culminate in societal equilibrium. Human mind is innately entrenched in injustice, inequity, unfairness, oppression, cupidity, jiggery-pokery and other ominous acts, which are inherent causes of conflict. This is evident in the deportment of some of our politicians in Nigeria, who usually plunge the citizens into acute hunger, oppression, poverty, inequality, exploitation, victimization, squandering of political funds, abuse of public offices and so on.

It is not also inane to descry conflict as a necessary catalyst for crescendo of good standard of living through unmitigated agitation for general welfare of man in the society. This assertion can easily be cemented with the current hue and cry of Tertiary Institutions’ workers in Ondo State,

Nigeria, for the swift and unconditional implementation of our minimum wage. It is a bizarre, antediluvian and repugnant atavism for the political doyen of the state to be taking penchant in subjecting certain segment of workers to utter economic anguish and suffering up to now, despite receiving whooping sum of Federal Government Allocation of revenue on monthly basis. This cavalier and iniquitous attitude is seen as a fly in the ointment of governance in this part of the world. This is grossly abhorrible. It is indubitable that there is always a light after tunnel. Victory is certain for the generality of workers in Ondo State Tertiary Institutions. The gravamen of this discourse is that conflict is very fertile for human existence, without which the welfare of man will be in perpetual shambles, if not complete existential nihilism.

➤ *Conflict of Interest*

This can simply be defined as an inconsistency between two parties in their preferences for the allocation of scarce resources.

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