

ORGANIZATIONAL CONFLICT AND CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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Abstract

Conflict in organization especially in secondary schools in Benue State has become a thing of concern for scholars, parents, teachers, governments and researchers. The study was designed to investigate organizational conflict and the management of conflict in secondary schools in Benue State. The study has prompted series of conflict between Principals, teachers and students which has dampened the moral of teachers and other staff and has negatively affected their productivity. This paper therefore, focuses on organization, management, conflict causes and its management. The paper further examined the effect of conflict on teachers and Principals job performance. Recommendations were made, among them include: school management should try and prevent conflict in schools student union government should be involved in school management schools security personnel are to be proactive in controlling conflict situations. And government should provide infrastructural facilities in schools to prevent students' complaint which may result into conflict situation.

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Meaning of organization

The word “organization” connotes two concepts: (1) an entity: a group (2) a process. An organization occurs when a group of people come together to organize themselves in a social unit. This social unit to become an organization has to be established with the explicit purpose of achieving certain goals (Abenga 1995 in Idoko 2017). Organization, therefore are social units deliberately constructed and reconstructed to seek specific goals. Typical organizations includes schools, hospitals, prisons, churches, clubs are all organization.

Organization is a social group whose differentiated activities are deliberately coordinated for the purpose of achieving a goal. One can therefore say that every organization is made up of human and physical resource, brought together in order to accomplish a predetermined goal. Thus organization is a means of achieving the best result from concerted efforts. It is the organizations that determine the type of people required and relationships, that is the type of personnel and structure needed in secondary school is different from the personal required in chemical industry.

Conflict simply means a disagreement between two parties (Olukayode, 2015). Alibi (2010) postulated that conflict in an organization in a state of friction caused by the actual or perceived opposition of needs, values and interests between working together. While Gibbons (2007) is of the view that a conflict situation is one that is characterized by the incapability of those concerned to iron out their differences. On one hand Azamoza (2004) argued that conflict can help strengthened the organization and enable the organization to improve its performance. Although, it has been observed that irrespective of the level of management, (Lower, Middle or Top) managers or administrators are bound to face conflict in as much they deal with human being. Therefore, the fear of conflicts should be ignored and focus should be placed on turning weakness to strength in developing the organization where they work. On the other hand, Olukayode (2015) exposes that politics in the organization give rise to conflict as employee or group of employees influence the goal and decision making of an organization to their own selfish interest, usually at the expense of some other employees with the organization. Therefore, agreeing to the term that conflict is an evitable feature of organizational life. In addition, Osabiya (2015) added that the state of strength of an organization lies along a continuum that ranges from a conflict free organization to a conflict ridden organization.

Conflicts represent part of the dynamics of organization. But when conflicts become too frequent within organization they divert attention from the more basic issues of development and achieving the goals of the organization. This is more so when such conflict escalate into open wars violence, disruption of school activities which actually consume substantial quantities of human and material resources.

Organizational conflict was focused on individual and groups, they emphasize that it is a disputed that occurs when interests, goals or values of different individuals or groups are conflicting with each other in organizations. Obi (2012) expressed that organizational conflict is an act of discontentment and contention which either the workers or employers of labour employ to put unnecessary pressure against each other so as to get their demands. In a similar vein Kazimoto (2013) established that organizational conflict is described as the presence of discord that occurs when goals, interests or values of different individuals or groups are incompatible and frustrated each other's attempt to achieve objectives in an organization. Olukayode (2015) also

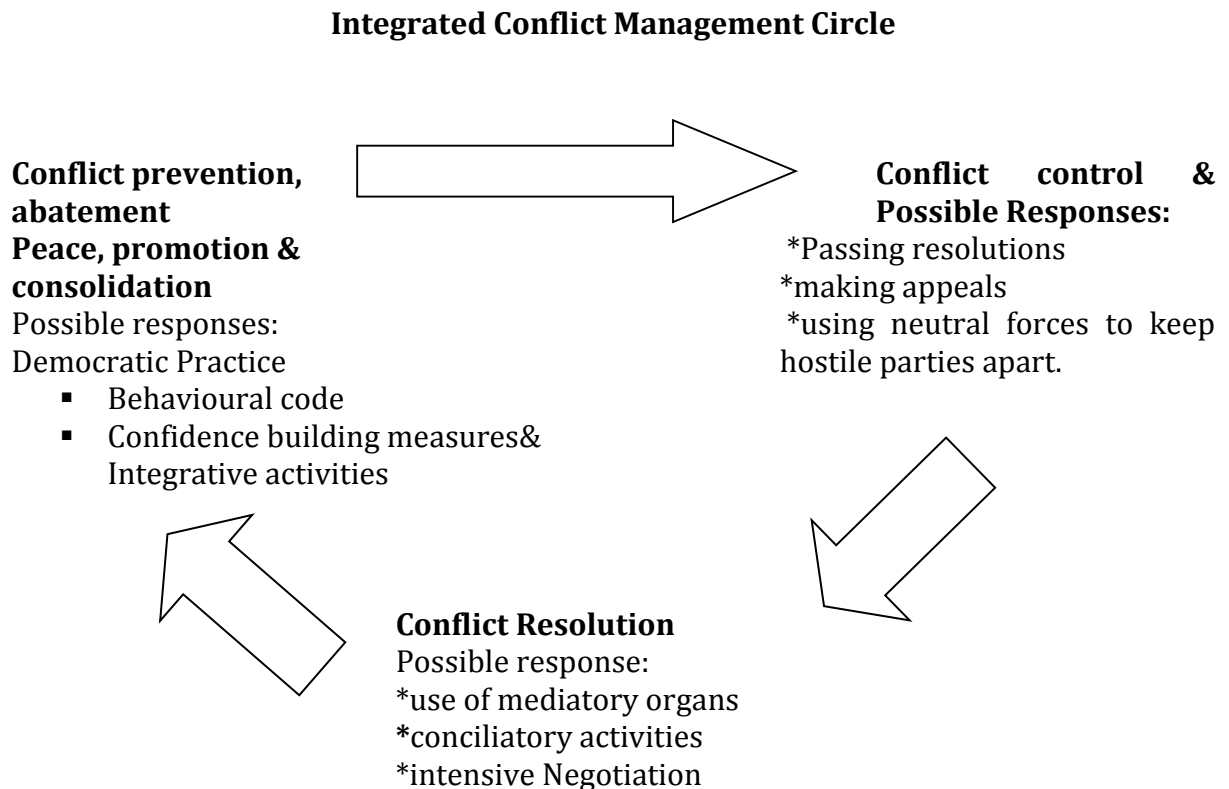
postulated that, organizational conflict within the context of employment relationship can be regarded as an inevitable clash of interests and resulting disputes of varying intensity between and with any or all of the active actors in organizations.

Hence, it is easy to assert that organizational conflict is a fact of life, in any organization as long as people will compete for jobs, power, recognition and security (Adomie & Anie, 2005). Therefore, the task of management is not to detract from organizational performance (Obasan, 2011). But it is strange that in the Nigerian secondary school, it is not possible that conflict improve performance due to the involvement of human. It is obvious that whenever there is student unrest, it is difficult to analysis the level of student's acquaintance prior to crisis and after crisis, but it is certain that properties will be vandalized and students time are wasted. Students are delayed to progress in their career especially when the council and management or management and student engaged in a crisis and the conflict is not well managed.

Conflict management refers to exertion, to regulate or control through a number of events (Adeyemi and Ademilua 2012). Osabiya (2015) refer to conflict management strategies as internal mechanisms used by the several authorities in resolving conflict. Consequently, Obasan (2011) claimed that management is duty bound to resolve conflict properly for the sake of increasing organizational performance and better productivity, because the outcome of such action will result in good communication, good cooperation, time management and it will increase corporate productivity. Although an effective conflict management as explained by Uchendu, Anijaobi and Odigwe (2013) pointed that cooperative atmosphere can be established to promote opportunities and movements towards directed reconciliation, nonaggressive or basic clashing interest. Constructively Uchendu, Anijaobi and Odigwe further explained that managed conflict induces a positive performance. while Akanji (2005) posited that poorly managed conflict heats up the environment to bring about disturbance of the entire group and polarization such as psychological and physical injury, reduced productivity on job performance, interference with problem activities, emotional distress and inability to sleep, escalation of differences into antagonistic position, malice and increased hostility amongst others.

Conflict management is also concerned with the ways and means of controlling and harmonizing conflictual relationships within an interaction process. This means that efforts at conflict management must seek to eliminate the conditions that create an environment of conflict. In other word, one should not wait for conflict to erupt before taking action. Conflict management in the integrated sense in which it is applied in this study represents a process embracing three types of activity: conflict prevention and /or peace promotion and consolidation; conflict control/abatement; and conflict resolution. Taken together, these three types of activity constitute what is here referred to as "the conflict management circle" represented below in figure 1.

Figure 1



In recent years, some scholars have tended to treat conflict resolution as distinct from conflict management. They see conflict management as a means of preventing the escalation of a conflict rather than of resolving it. This distinction seems only to apply, if one limits oneself to a purely strategic conception of conflict management in which the emphasis is on coercive techniques. If, however, the concept is conceived in its integrated form, conflict management can then represent a process in which the starting point is conflict prevention and/ or peace promotion and consolidation through the elimination of the causes for friction and the creation of a propitious atmosphere for harmonious relationships. This presupposes the existence of a base point of relative peace and harmony in human or inter-state relationships. It is a point at which friction is kept at tolerable levels and conflict management is concerned with peace promotion and consolidation, as well as conflict prevention. If conflict, however, erupts for whatever reason, then conflict management moves to a second stage. At this second stage, the efforts of the conflict manager are directed toward trying to control and abate the conflict, to defusing tension in order to create a suitable climate for the third and final phase. This third phase involves the eventual resolution of the conflict through intensive negotiations to settle all the fundamental issues associated with the conflict. Once the affected issues are resolved, conflict management can then be said to have gone full circle, with the relationship between the parties having returned to a tolerable level of friction. The conflict manager is now concerned with promoting and consolidating peace by taking measures to prevent future conflicts.

Different types of conflict management responses or measures are applicable to each of the three stages. At the first stage, possible activities include democratic practice, the establishment of behavioural codes, the creation of confidence building measures and the development of integrative activities. Measures often used at the second stage include appealing to the parties in conflict to exercise restraint, passing resolutions on general principles or guidelines for settlement and using neutral forces to keep the hostile parties apart. Possible responses at the third stages include various forms of conciliatory moves, intensive negotiations and use of mediatory organs.

Conflict Management Approaches

Conflict management approaches can be classified in a number of ways. They can, for instance, be classified into two broad categories: firstly on the basis of the level of escalation at which the particular conflict is being managed. In this sense, one can distinguish between the peaceful and the military approaches. The trademarks of the peaceful approach are negotiation, verbal persuasion, use of inducements, denial of privileges and subtle manipulation; short of the use of physical force, while those of the military approach relate to the use of physical coercion. The use of physical force could be by a party to the conflict or by a third party to promote on side's interests impose a settlement or create a situation in which diplomatic negotiation can occur.

Secondly, conflict management approaches can also be classified according to the status of the participants involved in the bargaining process. For example, a conflict could be managed through "negotiation", that is, direct bargaining by the parties involved in the conflict; or through "mediation", that is, with the help of a third party. Mediation can involve a wide range of activities, including fact finding, message carrying providing good offices and serving as an honest broker. Indeed, mediation can be used in a wider sense to include virtually all forms of third party involvement in conflict management. Here, however, third party involvement is classified into three types: the legal or judicial approach; the power-politics approach and the conciliatory approach.

The judicial approach relates to the management of conflict within a legal framework in which a third party is given or assumes the responsibility of reaching an effective decision concerning the settlement or resolution of a conflict. Such a decision is usually reached in accordance with pre-existing societal or international norms; the decision may or may not be binding. Arbitration by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) is a good example of this approach. The main problem with the judicial approach is that it usually results in a win-lose outcome. As such, it does not always lead to the effective resolution of a particular conflict and parties to a conflict that are not favoured by decision frequently choose to ignore. Fear of being adversely affected by judicial settlement often makes parties reluctant to refer their conflicts to a legal process. As this study show, these problems have frequently undermined the effectiveness of the elaborate legal framework created by the OAU and OAS to manage conflicts within their regions.

In the power-politics approach, third parties seek to manage conflicts out of a concern with their own broader strategic interests rather than with the interests of the parties to the conflict. For instance, throughout the cold War, the superpowers managed conflicts largely on the basis of how the outcomes might affect the East-West strategic balance. Arm balancing (keeping both sides at roughly equal levels of military strength while reaping economic rewards for arms-exporting nations) and the use of treats, blackmail and coercive physical intervention are common techniques deployed strategy

power-polities approach. As might be expected, this approach rarely addresses the underlying causes of a conflict and thus tends to produce either win-lose outcomes or, at best postpone future hostilities. The only type of coercive physical intervention not confined within the straight jacket of the power politics approach is the use of peacekeeping forces, especially by IGOs, to impose or maintain a cease-fire so that efforts toward a diplomatic solution can be pursued.

The conciliatory approach involves a process in which the third party tries to bring the parties in conflict to agreement through improving communications between them, helping to interpret the issues that divide them, helping to interpret the issues that divide them and exploring avenues toward a peaceful settlement. The essence of the conciliatory approach is to facilitated contact between the parties and provides them with an opportunity for face to face negotiation; thereby enabling them to appreciate each other's fears and concerns and to seek mutual understanding at the negotiating table. Intractable conflicts especially those involving deep emotion, necessarily require the systematic replacement of negative feelings and perceptions with positive ones and thereby helps the parties in conflict discover some mutuality of interests which could be capitalized on for the resolution of the conflict in question.

Among the conflict management methods that can be grouped under the conciliatory approach are appeasement, need satisfaction and problem solving. These three management techniques are closely related; indeed, all could be regarded as facets of problem-solving methodology. Appeasement is based on the proposition that conflicts usually become intractable and escalated into wars because of the failure to redress legitimate grievances. Of course, determining legitimate grievances is no easy task and appeasement is (as Hitler demonstrated) open to abuse. Yet, despite its poor reputation, one cannot but agree with Herman Kahn that the slogan: "appeasement never pays", is misleading and that there are many cases where accommodation and flexibility have not only prevented war but also led to détente, entente and friendship.

Concept of organizational conflict

Organizational conflict has been well-defined in several ways by many authors. Obi (2012) defines organizational conflict as an act of dissatisfaction and contention which either the employers of labour or workers utilize to put excessive pressure against each other so as to get their demands. Ajala and Oghenekohwo (2002) in their descriptions of organizational conflict, "a dispute that occurs when interests, values or goals of different individuals or groups are conflicting with each other in organizations". On this premise, organizational conflict within the setting of employment relationship can be considered as an unavoidable clash of interest, resulting to disputes between and within any or all of the active actors in organizations. Thus, it is certain that in the absence of common values in organizations, conflict is bound to occur.

Classification of organizational conflict

Organizational conflict can be divided into two broad types according to Ogunbameru (2006), he classified organizational conflict into informal and formal conflicts. Ogunbameru postulate that conflict in work-relations is formal when it results directly from a source of grievance and supposedly is wholly expressive in nature but it is informal when it is not based on any systematic organizational problem. In a similar vein, the formal organizational conflict as discussed by Albert (2001) expressed that the underlying sources cannot be directly seen, but can be deduced from unconscious form

of protest, unruly behavior, sabotage or even poor work-attitudes by employees in organizations. If the condition is sufficiently pervasive, it can meaningfully affect employee job description, turnover, focus and impact on the prosperity of an organization (Kazimoto, 2013). In another debate put forward by Ogunbameru (2006) he expressed that formal organizational conflict should be an organized expression of conflict pronounced through a trade union or other workers' representative. This type of conflict is highly noticeable, since it is often a cognizant approach or premeditated struggle to obtain adjustment in employment relationship. To sum all, Albert (2001) affirmed that there are two sides to organizational conflict, whether formal or informal, one is productive and healthy having a problem solving base and the other is destructive and unhealthy. However, the two conflict situations are neither good nor bad, since dissatisfaction and disagreement must occur in work-relations for adjustment to be created to improve total workplace performance. Nonetheless, knowing how the problem exists is not enough to make a conclusive statement on conflict in the workplace, it important to understand how such conflict can be carefully managed.

Causes of Conflict

It is impossible to separate conflicts from organizations. Organizational members come from different backgrounds, think so differently and communicate so uniquely. These make conflict a high probability. It becomes imperative therefore to determine the causes of conflict. It is important to state that many conflicts are either avoidable or unnecessary.

Most conflict arise out of simple miscommunication, misunderstandings, unintended meanings, irrelevant differences, poor choices, ineffective styles, unclear roles and responsibilities, false expectations, different standards, fluctuating economic and political conditions, or personal misfortune. These, very often have nothing to do with the issues that are the basis of the conflict and can easily be corrected with learning and dialogue (Elangovan, 1998).

Okotoni and Okotoni (2003), found that the following are the causes of conflict within the secondary school system. They are arranged in their order of importance.

1. Unimpressive conditions of service
2. Partial implementation of the minimum wage salaries approved by the Federal Government for workers.
3. Forceful and compulsory retirement/retrenchment of workers.
4. Administrative incompetence of principals.
5. Misappropriation and embezzlement of school funds.
6. Indiscipline (on the part of both staff and students).
7. Negligence of duty.
8. Personality clashes
9. Inferiority / Superiority complex.
10. Favouritism
11. Role conflicts
12. Misunderstanding of motives
13. Youthful exuberance

Hotepo, Asokere, Abdul-Azeez and Ajemunigbohun (2010) found the following in order of importance as causes of organizational conflict:

1. Lack of resources
2. Different expectations
3. Competition

4. Lack of cooperation
5. Salary comparison
6. Interdependence
7. Communication problems.

Aguba (2009), listed the following as causes of conflict in schools;

1. Principals Leadership style: According to Igbo (2002), any principal that is authoritarian in his/her leadership style is likely to issue draconian orders that are inimical to the growth, happiness and mutual cooperation of his/her subordinates (teachers and other workers) of course, conflict is the result.

2. Stress: This is a major cause of conflict in schools. Teaching is a 24hours business that requires both mental and physical energies. Some teachers who are overworked in terms of work load could easily get stressed and vent their anger at the slightest provocation. Conflict is the result.

3. Lack of Professional Training: Mgbodile (1997), opines that lack of professional training could engender conflict between principals and teachers. Teachers and principals who lack sound professional nurturing are bound to be continuously enmeshed in conflict situations due to lack of proper knowledge of role expectations and work schedule.

4. Poor Communication: Obi (1997), identifies poor communication system as a source of conflict in schools. Communication in any organization has the capacity of motivating or influencing behaviour. This is because as people interact with others to work or solve problems, ideas, attitudes and feelings are exchanged and understood. If communication in any organization is distorted and poorly conveyed, work may be paralyzed, frustration may set in and finally, conflict situations may arise. To this end, teachers whose duties and work schedules are not clearly stated and conveyed to are likely to be prone to frustration and by implication, crisis situation.

5. Poor Motivation: Obi (1997), posits that motivation is the perceptions, methods and activities used by the management for the purpose of providing a climate that is conducive to the satisfaction of the various needs of the employees so that they may become satisfied, dedicated and effective task performers. Okoro (1998), maintains that teachers are overworked and underpaid. A situation of this nature is sure to attract conflict, as a hungry man is an angry man.

The incessant strike actions involving teachers is a case in point.

Effects of Conflict in Organizations

Many believe that conflict is always a negative phenomenon. This standpoint is misplaced, as conflict could be both positive and negative depending on how it is handled. On the positive side, conflict;

1. Builds cooperation
2. Enhances organizational innovativeness and productivity
3. Engenders individual developments
4. Improves decision making both at individual and organizational levels
5. Conflict management and resolution skills are improved. On the negative side however conflict;

6. Interferes with organization operations
7. Engenders lack of cooperation
8. Enhances the wastage of resources
9. Engenders low productivity
10. Impedes cohesion in organizations including the schools.

Management of organizational conflict

Conflict management involves planning effective strategies to decrease the dysfunctions of conflict and develop the constructive functions in order to enhance learning and effectiveness of an organization (Rahim, 2002). The implication of this is that managing conflict essentially suggests avoidance or termination and reduction of the odds of non-productive escalation. As such, conflict management is the technique by which organizations and people handle grievance or disputes so as to find a middle way alternative to increase resolution, work towards consensus and offer genuine promise to decision-making. As perceived by Uchendu, Anijaobi and Odigwe (2013), since conflict is unavoidable in organizations, its management establishes whether it will cause positive or negative effect on the organizational performance. The timely identification and instant explanation of the underlying tension before go out of hand are appropriate to effectual management of conflict in the workplace. Managing organizational conflicts can be through several approaches however four major approaches were observed and they are discussed as follows.

1. Integrative approach

Integrative approach is often employed to inspire management to fulfill the needs of stakeholders in resolving conflict. Consequently, conflict management Integrative is a greatly disruptive process which can be affected in a number of separate ways in the organizations. Ford (2007) suggested a four-way process which includes assessment and inquiry, design, implementation and evaluation aimed at attaining valuable and objective conflict decision in the workplace. Vigil and King (2000) also opined that the use of integrative style of managing conflict is likely to create higher commitment in individuals and better result for the organization than teams using non-integrative conflict management. The integrative approach increases the understanding of how to resolve problem and increases resolution.

2. Collective bargaining

In the same vein, another approach to management of conflict is collective bargaining strategy. The strategy has been advocated as the approach for organizing union-management conflict in organizations. This approach is equally good for the conflicts resolution and management, depending on the situation. The approach is internationally applauded as the legal mechanism by which management and workers settle conflicts arising from employment contracts (Fajana and Shadare, 2012). In practice, negotiation between union and management is a process of meeting demands, discussing, presenting counter demands, bluffing and sometimes threatening all in a bid to reach collective agreement which involves collective approach to managing conflict by getting all parties involved. It was also observed that in the Nigeria context today, the faster rates of adoption of collective bargaining strategies have been encouraged even by the positive use of machinery for resolving conflict in some multination firms in the country has been adopted by the Nigeria Trade Union Amendment Act 2000 (Comboh, 2014).

3. Accommodation strategy

The avoidance strategy is also called conflict avoidance. It is however, very difficult for institutions to be silent about conflicts, while individuals can be advice or take a personal decision to partially or totally avoid conflicts by accommodating other parties with their difference. However, in an earlier work carried out by Thomas (2006), he pointed that avoidance, accommodation, compromise, competition and collaboration can also be used to manage conflicts. Thomas in his findings concluded that any organization using these methods to resolve conflict is sitting on a keg of gun-powder. Although the accommodation strategy is of the view that no amount of sacrifice is too much to allow peace to reign. It is a palliative approach which includes conciliation and submission. In the compromise strategy, in order to settle the conflictual problem, parties involved to the conflict are willing to give up something. While the competitive strategy involves win-lose method and survival of the fittest without taking other party into consideration. The last approach is collaboration which Thomas term as a win-win approach whereby there is willingness on the part of the parties involved to satisfy each other demands in preparation to settle the conflict. But for the collaboration strategy, it provides a short term solution to conflict situations. Because there should be a reflectiveness of cooperative and assertive in behaviours that all other approaches depend majorly on the structure of the organization.

4. Trade dispute strategy

In the provision of the Trade Dispute Act CAP 18, 2004 and Trade Disputes Amendment Decree, 1988, No. 39 was another conflict management approach for resolving conflict. Under these acts and degree, the award and sanctions of the National Industrial Court is final and binding on the employees and employers from the date of the award. These acts and degree translated to a high level of comportment for all parties involved in dispute to personally resolve issues before it get out of control. Trade Dispute Act also provides five steps for legal management of conflicts in an organization. These includes voluntary settlements of conflict using internal mechanism of complaint resolving procedure and the external mechanism involving appointment of conciliator, mediator, reference of disputes to industrial arbitration panel, National Industrial Court and the constitution of a Board of Inquiry if such is considered essential.

Conclusion

This study suggested that the usual way of using force to stop crises or conflict is only necessary as an emergent measure. This means that management of conflicts and crises can stem down the tide of these evils or worsen them. Therefore, it is imperative that the management should go beyond the use of force to bring lasting solution and peace to a societal conflict or crises. Likewise, it has been generally acknowledged that conflict is somewhat unavoidable and is not always or necessarily bad for an organization especially in secondary schools. If properly managed, conflict can lead to the development of new ideas because in the mist of adversity the organization must also strive and derive a means of managing the situation on ground while the operation continues. Management must create internal cohesiveness among groups for smooth ruling of the organization. Therefore, the key for organizational success is to spot, recognize and manage conflict efficiently for the good of the organization, rather than to simply avoiding it. No crisis is too small to handle and it must be resolved easily and enough especially at the initial stage. Secondary schools management should intensify effort at preventing conflict and when it occurs, it should be properly managed..

Recommendation

For better resolution of crises and conflict in Nigeria, the following should be adhered to. Peacekeepers or mediators are not there to allot blames or worsen the condition. They are peace makers and should see their mission so. Legitimate parties involved representation is crucial. For a better resolution, there is need to permit good representation of the groups, societies or communities involved in a conflict. This according to Ahtisaari (2009) allowing parties involved to participate in the discussion will provide both parties with first-hand information of the problems involved as well as give recognition to the groups concerned rather than granting attention or listening to rumour, fake news or side talks. Likewise, the concerned parties must give full support and show commitment to resolving issues at the round table meeting by their willingness to find a peaceful solution. The parties concerned must be prepared to compromise as well as reach a concession to accommodate a give and take affair in the conflicts or crises. Evidences reveals that, at the end of discussion on conflicting issues, usually there is no side completely right or wrong, the more reason why room should be given to dialogue. As such, sacrifice(s) still need to be made by each of the parties involved. Forcing one party or the other to embrace and implement the resolutions than they themselves will means steering up more conflicts. Likewise, peacekeepers or mediators must equally have a good focus. At the end mediators should see their mission to be more of prevention of the re-occurrence of the problem that caused the crisis and conflict and laid good foundation for reconciliation.

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