Conflict Management in Organization: Gender Perspective

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Abstract

Organizations experience many factors that lead to dysfunction in their performance. Conflict in organization produces a climate which culminates into chaos if not timely checked. Many organizations have created several strategies to manage conflicts or even prevent it but these have not been successful. The potentials of women have not been fully explored in the context of conflict management. It is the aim of this paper to buttress the importance of involving women in conflict management because of certain imbued qualities they possess. These qualities were listed and highlighted upon. Recommendations were made on the indispensability of women in conflict management.

Keywords: Conflict, management, Gender

Introduction:
The word Conflict means to fight or to struggle for something. There are other variables that relate to conflict such as crisis which has an emotional and spontaneous aspect and has a duration that is not that long.

Dispute is another variable and it has a sense of quarrelsomeness. Litigations is also another variable which based on a question of interpretation aspects. A disagreement is contestation between two or more parties about opinions on respective interest. Conflict possesses all

of the above mentioned attributes. For this the issue of conflict in organization is serious and every hand must be managed to help the organization to forge ahead.

Conflict in organization is not new. It is as old as organization. Conflict is unavoidable but its presence can be minimized through timely and wisely intervention. Conflict is a state of opposition between two parties or two individuals. Many factors contribute to the emergence of conflicts in organizations. In order to minimize conflicts, It is usually better to acquaint one self with the cause as well as highlighting the consequences. In any place where two or more people have come together to pursue a common purpose, conflicts exist. It exists in organization between colleagues, workers and the management staff, or between two groups may be department or unit or section. A conflict ridden organization do not effectively achieve the purpose for which it was set out. It is always dysfunctional.

In conflict management, it seems women are not always considered an effective machinery, most often men are used in managing conflict. In analyzing the nature of women, it seems that, they are better equipped for conflict management. It is the highlight of the paper, to buttress the importance of involving women mostly in conflict management so that conflicts will be minimized or reduced drastically.

Currier, (2005) found out that "though women are excluded from official peace – building and conflict recognition efforts, they still organize themselves in many unofficial ways. This they do through participation in non-profit organizations, support groups and grass roots, activitism in their communities. Even in their official working places, they extend this support attitude of bringing peace when there is conflict"

Causes of Conflict
Conflict is opposition between two parties resulting from struggles over values, ideas for power and resources (Sanchez, 2011).
To be in conflict connotes being in disagreement or contradictory or in opposition (Moris 2000).

Anywhere there is more than one person there is bound to be different ideas, behaviours and interests which can create conflict. These differences in ideas and behaviours emerge due to differences of make up of individuals, socio-cultural background, educational attainment etc. Conflict is a natural state of affairs, it is bound to take place and in some places it may beneficial. It may lead to a higher quality of products and services (Foundation Coalition 2011). Some of the factors that lead to conflicts in organizations are:

- The uncertainty that accompanies organizational change heightens the prospects for intra-organization conflict.
- When there is unclear boundaries of responsibilities.
- When there are differences of interest whether in intra-group, inter-group, interpersonal or social.
- When there is scare resources to go round to all the sectors in the organization that are in need of funds or professional services.
- Other causes can emanate from personality issues in organization.
- Sometimes family problems.
- Poor performance can generate conflict in any group setting when workers perform below standard.
- Poor communication can cause conflict, if it is ambiguous or delayed.
- Office romance can generate conflict
- Public display of affection may lead to accusation of favouritism in the organization.
- Social loading which is the absence of individual effort among the group efforts. This is when a person is not contributing his/her fair share to the group, thinking that others will pick up his/her slack.

Consequences of Conflict in Organization

- Unresolved conflict in the workplace has been linked to miscommunication resulting from confusion and refusal to cooperate.

- It has raised quality problems and missed deadlines and delays. Injured parties may decide to delay their respective tasks or doing it according to laid down standard.
- It has increased stress among employers and employees alike. Consequences of conflict in organization cannot be over stated.
- The presence of conflict results is reduced creative collaborations and team problem solving.
- It leads to disruption of work flow. It leads to decreased customer or client satisfaction.
- It leads to distrust, split camps, gossip, rumour mongering and even at times it can lead to death.
- Conflict can lead to waste of resources.
- Unresolved conflict also lead to strike
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- Conflict may result to high rate of employee turnover.

Management of conflict by women

Due to the fact that conflict is inevitable in many organizations many strategies have been adopted by management staff of such organization to tackle conflict issues. Despite that, organizations are still experiencing serious unresolved conflicts and these are mitigating against the realization of the cooperate goal.

Conflict can be organizational or social in nature no matter the nature of the conflict the process of managing it is by providing each side needs and adequately addressing their interests so that they are satisfied with the outcome.

Over the years, women have been relegated to the background in the area of conflict management. It is about high time the women contributions to peacemaking must be acknowledged.

Abdukarim (2002) said 'it is about time that the people of Nigeria are indeed of the whole world appreciated the tremendous potentiality that is inherent in this (so called) weaker sex. "Many ways, they are much stronger".

Peace women (2004) asserted.

That "women and men have different access to resources, power and decision making before, during and after conflicts. The experience of women and men in situations of tension, war and past conflict reconstruction is significantly different". In many organizations it seems many women do not have free access to resources, power and decision making as regards to conflict as much as their male counterparts. This situation has jeopardized the management of conflict in the organizations.

Wiki books (2011) made us to belief that an effective conflict solver must avoid generalizations about the parties and situations. He/She must try to observe each person and situation in the context they exist. Women by their nature are more sensitive & patient to observe and record their observations. Men are impatient and always in a hurry and for that they would jump into wrong conclusion.

Women by their nature are good nurturers, social problem solvers and excellent negotiators.

The Gender schema theory confirms these attributes of women. The theory was propounded by Sandra Bem in 1981. This theory combines the social learning and cognitive learning theories. Gender Schema theory implies children learn about what it means to be male and female from the culture in which they live. It concerns the development of an internal Schema, or mental framework which organizes and directs the behaviour of an individual (Brannon 2002).

In the Nigerian society, we can see the implication of the theory, girls are made to believe that they ought to be submissive, dependent, sensitive, more receptive and more tactful than their counterpart who are more assertive, insensitive, dominant etc. In organization conflict management, the qualities of women are more likely to be utilized in the conflict management. Surprisingly the reverse is the case as more men are found in conflict resolution in many organization.

Wiki books (2011) went on to analyze the traditional Gender characteristics.

Feminine Characteristics	**Masculine Characteristics**
Submissive	**Dominant**

Dependent	**independent**
Emotional	**rational**
Receptive	**Assertive**
Intuitive	**analytical**
Timid	**Brave**
Passive	**Active**
Sensitive	**Insensitive**

There are other certain attributes that a problem solver or conflict manager must posses and one of them is tact. Diaz (2008) said that "tact is being mindful of the other person and the context while taking into account one's own account".

Tact is very important for keeping or creating harmonious relationship. Women are more tactful than men. Even in the families, they utilize this attribute, by keeping the family coordinated and organized. Those women in the organization can also utilize this potential if they are given the opportunity to manage conflict in the organization.

Diaz also went on to bring forth another factor that can help in conflict management and he said ***"Words were originally magic and to this day words have retained much of their ancient magical power. By words one person can make another blissfully happy or drive him to despair"***. Women use more soft and low tone in situation of chaos unlike the men. Magic language is good for negotiated solutions and it may generate the changes required for conflict management. Women who more sensitive than men, and more emotionally attached to people. They are the ones that often use this magic language………..words. All these go to buttress the point that more women must be employed in conflict resolution in organizations because of these their attributes.

Foundation coalition (2011) came up with modes for conflict management. Five modes were listed and analyzed. Conflict management decreases the odds of non   productive escalation. It involves acquiring skills related to conflict resolution, self awareness about conflict modes, conflict communication skills and establishing a structure for management of conflict in the organization.

The five conflict management modes are:
- **Competing**
- **Avoiding**
- **Accommodating**
- **Compromising**
- **Collaborating**

Each of these modes are characterized by two sides, assertiveness and cooperation.

Competing is used when quick and perhaps unpopular decisions are to be made. It is characterized by high assertiveness and low cooperation. Skills needed for this mode are arguing or debating, using rank of influence, asserting your opinion and feelings, standing your ground, stating your position clearly.

Avoiding is another mode, this is characterized by low assertiveness and low cooperation, it is used when issues of low importance is at stake or when someone is in a low position. Skills needed are ability to withdraw, ability to sidestep issues, ability to leave things unresolved, and sense of timing.

Accommodation mode is characterized by low assertiveness and high cooperation. Skills needed in this mode are forgetting your desires, selflessness, ability to yield and obeying orders. Compromising is characterized by moderate assertiveness and moderate cooperation.

Collaboration is another mode used in conflict management. It is characterized by high assertiveness and high cooperation. Collaborated skills are active listening, non-threatening confrontation, identify concerns and analyzing inputs. It can be seen as giving up more than you want. Skills utilized in this mode are negotiation, assessing values, finding a middle ground and making concessions from the analysis of these modes, Accommodation and Collaboration are characterized by high cooperation. Accommodation someone is giving in order to satisfy others and collaboration handling is when, people try to satisfy both sides.

From the gender characteristics enunciated by Wiki books, it looks certain that the female gender have the qualities for conflict management, due to their nature. They are more attuned to accommodating people and collaborating with others more than their male counterpart.

Many organizations have established many ways of managing conflict but most times the efforts of women were not considered in this regard and most often, the strategy of conflict management may prove to be dysfunctional due to the absence of women. Women have the integrating potential and know how to use suiting words at the appropriate time to achieve their goals. The males are always in a hurry and most times insensitive and with their insensitive nature they may not analyze the situation properly and patiently to the detriment of the organization. Adults tend to respond positively to a more democratic leadership than to high assertiveness type of leadership which are the characteristics of men.

Any method that organization may want to utilize in conflict management, let the women be much involved than the men so that the conflict can be managed properly.

Conclusion

As conflict is a natural state of affairs in organization which is bound to happen, efforts must be made to prevent and manage conflict when it comes. There are some conflicts that can be resolved and that is they may not rear up again, but there are some that cannot be resolved, then they must be managed properly by competent hands so as to prevent them from making the organization un productive.

Women by their socialization are more prone to peaceful environment hence good conflict managers. Any decision concerning conflicts and its management must involve women as well as involving them during implementation.

Recommendation

- The exclusion of women from decision-making positions as regards to conflict management must stop. Women

must be involved more than the men in conflict resolution because they have the more wherewithal to manage conflicts.

- Women must be provided with the necessary spaces for their voices to be heard and their contributions must be acknowledged.
- The men folk must be oriented to put more time and efforts at the home front, so as to give women more time and energy to seek for employment outside the homes in order to help in dispelling conflict and its consequences in organization where they found themselves.
  - The profile of women must be raised in conflict prevention resolution, post conflict peace building both among indigenous people and among general people.
  - Women must be encouraged to seek decision-making positions and build mechanisms which enable them to have access to such positions whether in the traditional or modern governance system.

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