

2ND PAPER: STRATEGIES IN RESOLVING CONFLICT SITUATIONS IN AN ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENT

PRESENTED BY CMRD. C.B. ASOMUGHA

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1.0 CONFLICT: A DEFINITION

“...THE CLASH OF INTERESTS AND RESULTING DISPUTES OF VARYING INTENSITY, BETWEEN (AND WITHIN) INDIVIDUALS, GROUPS AND ORGANISATIONS IN THE INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS SYSTEMS”. – ZAGELMEYER 1998.

CONFLICTS CAN BE:

- **LATENT OR MANIFEST;**
- **REAL OR IMAGINED**
- **CONFLICT IS INEVITABLE IN THE WORK PLACE AS IT IS IN REAL LIFE**

2.0 SOURCES OF CONFLICT

A. INTERNAL SOURCES

- These are disagreements that emanate from within the organisation:

#Management vs Union

#Union vs Union

Intra-Union

B. EXTERNAL SOURCES

- Government industrial and economic policies (IPPIS);

- **The nature of labour legislation;**
- **Unpatriotic and unethical behaviour of the political and economical classes;**
- **Skewed distribution of wealth**

Sources of conflict can also be viewed as:

- 1. Ideological (feelings, philosophies and attitude. Difficult to resolve since they are difficult to identify or quantify. They are embedded in the psyche and mentally determine one's choices.)**
- 2. Real conflicts involve tangible behaviour that can be identified and can usually be measured in some way. Could be due to poor performance, lack of time, lack of knowledge, etc.**

3.0 THE PECULIARITY OF THE ACADEMIC SETTING

- Horton (1995), established that resolving conflicts in tertiary education is significantly different than in a corporate setting, because the culture in the former deliberately encourages spirited discussion of alternative views, diversity of perspectives and critical analysis.**
- Some of this peculiarity exist in Productivity standards, Contracts, sabbaticals, etc, as well as academic freedom.**

4.0 MANIFESTATIONS OF CONFLICT

- Resistance**
- Strikes**
- Lock outs**
- Work to rule**
- Rallies,**
- Slow downs**
- Sabotage**
- Complaints, sack and grievances**
- Interdiction**
- Victimization**
- Impeachment**
- Factionalisation, etc.**

5.0 CAUSES OF CONFLICT IN POLYTECHNICS AND SIMILAR INSTITUTIONS

- Style of management
- Highhandedness of management
- Reverse mentorship
- Favouritism, cronysm
- Ego inebriation
- Indiscipline
- Glory hunting
- Vaulting ambition
- Pursuit of personal motives
- Wages and allowances
- Personnel matters
- Physical environment
- Psychological environment
- Orientation and social consciousness of workers

6.0 DEALING WITH CONFLICTS

Thomas (1976) advanced a theory of five basic conflict handling styles:

1. Competing (dominating or forcing: “I win, you lose” approach).
2. Collaborating (Problem solving: “win-win”).
3. Accommodating (You win, I lose).
4. Compromising (I win some, I lose some; You win some, you lose some).
5. Avoiding style (head in the sand).

7.0 HANDLING CONFLICTS

Thomas (1992) modified the five strategies into a dual-dimensional approach:

1. Cooperativeness (the willingness to consider others’ interests in the conflict);
2. Assertiveness (the inclination to favour one’s own interests in a dispute).

8.0 WHY CONFLICTS ARE DIFFICULT TO RESOLVE OR MANAGE

- Conflicts are not living beings and thus cannot resolve themselves;
- Human players determine the extent to which conflicts are resolved or managed;
- These human players are in management, the union or in external capacity;
- The harvard law school traces the difficulty in resolving conflicts to the attitude (the mindset) with which the participants in a dispute come to the table:

“When a conflict looms, it can be tempting for each side to try to make unilateral decisions on key issues because of the belief that negotiations with the other side will be a dead end”.

9.0 THE “REAL” CHALLENGE

- The ideological realm, i.e. the psyche, attitude, mindset, perception usually presents the major challenge to easy resolution/management of the conflicts we face with management, other unions or within our union;
- My experience is that in many of the instances where conflicts with management had spiralled out of control, the problem had been traced to:
 1. The ego rivalry of those on opposing sides of the conflict;
 2. Dearth of knowledge of procedure or reality on the side of both or either of the opposing parties;
 3. Extreme rigidity on the part of either of the opposing parties.

N.B. Structural and inherent challenges also exist which hinder swift progress toward mutually beneficial resolution of the crisis that confront us. Note also that we often meet managements and governing councils that are at best recalcitrant, belligerent and inflexible.

- How do we process our entrenched, even if erroneous perceptions?

10.0 SOME CONSIDERATIONS ON PERSPECTIVE/MINDSET

1. The Management and the Union have clearly defined roles and these should not be breached;
 - ✓ The Union and the Management are not sworn enemies whose lines will never cross;
 - ✓ The Union is the conscience of the environment but not the executioner, judge or enforcer;

- ✓ There is no position of Executive Chairman in our constitution;
- ✓ The Chairman is the leader of the team, but every other position has clearly defined roles in the Constitution;
- ✓ We are not in a struggle for superiority with the Management;

11.0 DESIRABLE ATTITUDINAL CUES

- 1) **Honesty and Integrity**
- 2) **Confidence**
- 3) **Inspire others**
- 4) **Commitment and passion**
- 5) **Good communicator**
- 6) **Decision-making capabilities (consult stakeholders)**
- 7) **Accountability**
- 8) **Delegation and empowerment**
- 9) **Creativity and Innovation**
- 10) **Empathy**

These latter cues will come in handy in handling both external and internal crisis.

12.0 CONCLUSION

- In the end, how much we succeed at the task of leading our union at all levels depends on us;
- Creative and innovative leadership will determine whether we are real leaders or we are merely followers pretending to be leaders;
- The critical factor is not how much we have been able to prove our power and authority, but to what extent we are able to successfully pursue the goals of our congresses and uphold the highest traditions of ASUP.
- May the almighty bless your diligence and establish you in success.