



## MANAGEMENT OF ORGANIZATIONAL ROLES AND CONFLICTS IN NIGERIA SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines the Management of organizational roles and conflicts in Nigeria Secondary School in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Organizations (such as the school system) are made up of individuals and heterogeneous sub-groups who pursues their personal interests/goals and that of the goals of the organization. At every point in time in the organizational hierarchy, the educational administrators ensure that there is a balance of individual and organizational goals (goal congruency). Organizations are effectively administered when roles are assigned to staff who are compelled to interact, co-exist and function harmoniously to sustain proper functioning of the organization and goal attainment. These roles given out to various personnel in the organization (school system) must be clearly defined so as to make for a conflict-free organization. It is in view of this fact that organizations make deliberate efforts to ensure that conflicts are efficiently managed and resolved in the work environment, for the sustenance of peace and stimulation of sustainable development. An extensive discussion was made on organizational roles, nature and causes of organizational conflicts, contemporary administrative actions and effects of each of them to arrive at a concrete resolution of conflicts in formal organizations. In conclusion, conflicts often arise as a result of discrepancies or differences between role expectation and role perceptions, hence, educational administrators need to ensure that these discrepancies are minimized. It was suggested among others that the roles assigned to staff in the education industry should be properly defined for the purpose of achieving predetermined educational objectives.

**Keywords:** Management, Organizational Roles, Organizational Conflicts, Conflict Resolution.

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### INTRODUCTION

Organizations are effectively administered when roles are given out to various personnel. These roles are properly outlined to ensure that there are no conflicts and no vacuum. Thus, every

organization has cut out roles for each of its personnel. This has given rise to partitioning of organizations into various departments, each with its own specific tasks. However, despite efforts put in place to ensure a conflict free organization, there has and will always be conflicts but this can be properly managed to ensure greater organisational effectiveness and performance. Organizational behaviour is positively related to organizational output. For this reason, the educational administrator needs to take conflict management issues as very important issues because conflicts and attempts towards resolution are perhaps the most powerful force existing for bringing about changes in patterns of organizational behaviour (Hanson, 2002). It is important to note that a conflict is an inevitable part of life. It is part of human nature to disagree. What is important is, what is done with disagreements in the family, organization, village, communities and society as a whole, hence, it can be asserted that the management of conflict rather than its occurrence is the bane of societies.

The organization is made up of individuals and heterogeneous sub-groups. These vary a great deal in their personal goals, roles performed, values, the interests pursued and goal attainment. However, they are compelled to interact, co-exist and function harmoniously to sustain proper functioning of the organization and goal attainment. Conflicts may occur between individuals or the sub-groups. In whichever way, if the conflicts are not curtailed and kept at minimal level either in frequency or intensity, proper functioning of the organization might be impeded and the goals might never be attained.

It is in view of this fact that organizations make deliberate efforts to ensure that conflicts are managed and resolved in the work environment for the sustenance of peace and stimulation of sustainable development. This paper examines the organizational roles, nature and causes of organizational conflicts as well as contemporary administrative actions and effects of each of them to arrive at a concrete resolution of conflicts in formal organizations.

## **The Concept of Roles**

The term role has a multiplicity of meanings and is used duplicitously by different persons as such there is a confusion as to the true meaning and import of the word, this often times has led to conflicts within an organization. Role pertains the acting one does in a given assigned duty or as if to play a role and not be real or true to the self, to the description of what one does on paper (not necessarily in reality). Role however, is more complex and a necessary organizational component.

Nnabuo et al. (2006) described it as a psychological state that is concerned with the exercise of behaviour derived from interaction with other human beings. It is used to describe the set of expectation held by people in the organization about an individual in his job. The American Heritage Dictionary (1976) defined it as:

- A character or part played by an actor in a dramatic performance;
- The characteristic and expected social behaviour of an individual;
- A function or position.

In organizations, role could actually be defined as all of the above. One does act the part they are expected to play or the role as given. Someone within an organization needs to be in the role of director and producer to authorize the part, define their expectations for the part, describe the way in which they want the part to be played, pay for the part, and so on, giving the context and

organizational meaning to the role being undertaken. One can also assume a role in a rather convincing way without truly being in role. Acting is also an appropriate definition in that we often find it difficult to assume an organizational role because of the difficulty of negotiating between emotional feelings about work roles and job expectations regardless of our competencies and skills. Organizational role, though, is not just about performing in role. The second definition also applies as we consider how one takes their organizational role. Organizations and their parts have certain cultures. These groups and subgroups have stated and unstated behaviours that are considered appropriate and others that are not. One's assumption of an organizational role needs to consider these behavioural aspects in order to fit in, get the work accomplished, manage day-to-day activities and operate professionally and personally in an effective manner.

It is pertinent to state that a person's behaviour and personal style does not have to match or mirror the organizations but the two needs to coexist; the differences and similarities must be understood and negotiated. The way in which a person in a role takes these dynamic parts and incorporates them into their role is critical to that person's performance, effectiveness, health, relatedness, and longevity in the organization.

The third definition gives the generally accepted notion of a role - a role as a function or position that has a set of parameters within which it must complete some set of tasks. This configuration, however, is usually not adequately defined in a job description. The subtleties and dependencies of each task make the reality of working within a function or position more complicated. The ability to function or be in a position is complicated by the pressures within an organizational system; by the ongoing negotiation between what one is given and what one takes for the role within which they are to be working.

The deductions from the foregoing is that, role is very much defined and shaped by the individual in it and what the individual brings with her/him, while organizational role may be identical in several ways like the way in which they work, their effectiveness and success. Two people who find themselves in the same organizational role can achieve varying levels of effectiveness and success due to the impact of their "individual-ness" in what has been given to them and how they take-up and work in these roles. This is especially true in the context of any change that these individuals may face in their work role. One person might thrive in the exciting, albeit unsettling, position of managing a change effort while another might make limited progress. Another school manager may find the change opportunity as invigorating, yet, another might become stressed and, perhaps, burned-out from the experience. There are also components of role, such as feelings, pressures and experiences, which are a product of the organization and not the individual. Krantz and Maltz (2014) affirmed that role then can be thought of as the way in which one works-in-role, including an individual:

- Specific assigned duty, activity, purpose and/or function that is required for the pursuit of some common effort in a group, team and/or organizational effort;
- Part, piece or share in the overall mission and system-of-tasks present in an organization;
- Unconscious, assigned and/or assumed function in the covert system of irrationalities or sentience attendant to the organizations overall mission and system of tasks;
- The way in which an individual understands and then works with their role as given and taken within the organizations systems of task and sentience.

In managing organizational roles, care must be taken to ensure that personnel understands the part of the organization expects them to play, the organizational culture (s) that shape behaviour, the various relationship and interactions with others within the organization, and the actual function that is needed in the system. This is so because it will help to forestall or limit conflicts within an organization. In order to understand the subject matter clearly, Nnabuo et al. (2006) outlined the following terms:

- **Role Description:** This is the actual behaviour of an individual performing a role.
- **Role Prescription:** This is used to describe the general norms in the culture for a particular role. This refers to accepted ways of doing things within an organisation which may not be formally stated.
- **Role Expectation:** refers to the expectation a person has of the role behaviour of another. For example parents expect teachers to ensure quality.
- **Manifest and Latent Roles:** In an Organization like the school, one may as well as being a teacher, be holding either one or more of the following positions: Editor of the school newsletter, chairman of the disciplinary committee, labour master and so on. When engaged in the primary role (of teaching), one is said to be playing his manifest role. But when engaged in editing the school newsletter or any other role(s) that are secondary to the primary function of teaching, one is said to be playing his latent role.

## **Organizational Roles**

Based on the foregoing and for the purpose of this paper, organizational roles are the specific functions and activities assigned to individuals within an organization in order to achieve the goals of the organization. Appreciating the concept of role enables us to see where the person and system meet. From this point, we can think about the person in context, and the interrelations between the two. It reveals the impact of the organization on the individual, in terms of the experience of fulfilling a particular part, as well as revealing the impact of the individual on the larger organization in terms of how individuals take up their roles and, in turn, enact the set of systemic forces that are expressed through the role. Since the concept of role creates a window into organizational life where the individual and the system meet, role allows us to think carefully about how the individual inter-links with the system and the demands and expectations for performance it imposes on its members. The formal role delegated to an individual carries with it responsibility and authority to work on certain tasks in certain ways, although, there may be a discrepancy between the stated authority and what authority accompanies a delegation. Symbolic meanings, informal tasks, covertly authorized work, and so on, are also attached to roles and, in turn, affect the texture of collaboration, competence and meaningful contribution. By broadening role to include all of its constituent elements, we can begin to appreciate the complexity of the concept and the range of forces impinging on people at work.

## **Concept of Conflicts**

Ogonor (2004) perceived conflict as the process where a party deliberately makes an effort to block the efforts of another person and thereby frustrates the latter in his attempt to attain his goals or further his interest. Similarly, where there is disagreement between groups over the reality of their interdependence due to differing positions in the organization's authority or status

in the system, it is conflict. In the same vein, when the action of a person prevents, obstructs, interferes in some other way and makes it impossible for another person to carry out his/her desired action, conflict persists. Fajana (2013) observed that conflict could be broadly perceived as a situation of disagreement between two parties. Therefore, a conflict situation is that in which the parties involved are unable to iron out their differences. Armstrong (2006) emphasized that conflict functions by means of adjustments and compromise among competitive elements in their structure and membership. Fajana (2013) expressing a similar view observing that conflict in the organizations or community is endemic, though, it is sometimes regarded as deviant behaviour in either the organization or community. Conflict could be of various types, it could be between individuals, among peers or subordinates and inter-ordinates (this type of conflict is called inter-personal conflict). Conflict could also be between sub-groups in the organization. Such type of conflict is called inter-group conflict. Armstrong (2006) cautioned that conflict between individuals raises fewer problems than conflict between groups. This is because individuals can act independently and resolve their differences. On the other hand, members of groups may have to accept the norms, goals, values and attitudes of their groups. In such a situation, the individual's loyalty is subordinate to that of the group.

There are three views of occurrence of conflicts, they are: the traditionalist, the human relations and the interactionist approach. Robbins (2000) stated that the traditionalist views conflict as detrimental to the attainment of community goals. Therefore conflict should be eliminated from the community. This view was concurred by Igwe (2006) thus: the traditionalist approach to conflict is one of suppression and elimination. It is believed therefore that conflict is the antithesis of co-operation and organization. The Human Relations school of thought sees conflict as a determining force of group's performance. On the other hand, The Integrationist's view tends to encourage the occurrence of conflict in the organization. This school contends that a harmonious peaceful group is prone to become static, apathetic and not responsive to their needs for changes and innovation. Therefore, their leaders are encouraged to maintain an on-going a level of conflict to keep the group viable, self-critical and creative. However, the occurrence of conflicts that hinder group performance and coexistence of people is discouraged by the exponents of Interactionalism.

### **Types of Role Conflicts**

This refers to the incompatibility of roles, a clash or disagreement occurring as a result of two roles that cannot be simultaneously fulfilled. For example a wife whose husband works as teacher in a school where she is the principal may find it difficult to act as her role as a wife is in conflict with her role as a principal.

The Getzels and Guba nomothetic-idiographic model of conflict resolution conceives of the educational system as having nomothetic and idiographic dimensions (Morphet et al., 1974 in Ereh, 2011). While the former comprises the school as an institution with its own set of roles and expectations, the latter emphasizes the personality of the individuals who holds office or status within the institutionalized education system. The administrative behaviour of the members of the institutions, according to the theory will be the nature of the interaction between the nomothetic, that is the demands of the established institutions and the idiographic that is the personalities and the need dispositions of their members (Edem, 2012). Ereh (2002) postulates three types of conflicts that may arise from the union to be Role—Personality Conflicts, Role Conflicts and Personality Conflicts.

**Role- Personality Conflicts:** occur when a role expectation ascribed to a position is at variance with the need-disposition of the incumbent e.g. the behaviour of a technical school teacher who embezzles the fees she collects from her class students is in utter conflict with the role expected of her as a role model for students to emulate.

**Role Conflict:** where the role incumbent is expected to conform simultaneously to two or more contradictory sets of expectations as a result of which conformity to one infringes on that of another e.g. nepotism is common in the less developed nations, is the expression of conflict between cultural values and institutional expectations.

**Personality Conflict:** may occur as the outcome of opposing demands e.g where an instructor who believes strongly in democratic principles finds himself in situations which force him to assume an autocratic role. Edem (2012) argues that other sources of conflicts inherent in the school system are

**The Role Perception of Members:** where role perception refers to how members think they are expected to behave and how others actually expect them to behave. The difference between how principals see their roles and how they actually perform those roles and the differences between the way instructors think their (heads of departments and principals) expect them to perform and actual expectations of the leaders.

According to Miles (2014) and Peretomode (2001), conflicts could have both functional and dysfunctional consequences in an organization. To the extent that a conflict can easily disorganize school decisions, that is dysfunctional, while on the other hand, it enhances functionality of school activities by encouraging healthy competitions. Sanusi (2012) identified various types of role conflicts, these include:

- **Intra-role Conflict:** This is when various members in a role set simultaneously and legitimately make differing demands on a single role. For example, a teacher may experience conflicts as he attempts to fill the role of a teacher as well as a counsellor.
- **Inter-role Conflict:** This is when an individual has to perform roles that negate rather than supplement each other. Kahn et al. (1999) defined it as the simultaneous occurrence of two or more) sets of pressures such that compliance with one would make difficult compliance with the other.
- **Intra-departmental Conflict:** This is which members of the same unit are opposed to another due to different viewpoints. This is usually complicated by the fact that both views are appropriately informed and correct.
- **Inter-departmental Conflict:** This is when two or more departments compete for facilities and aids in the organization. Assembly hall, playground, lecture halls and libraries are usually sources of interdepartmental conflicts in educational institutions.
- **Intra-organizational Conflict:** This form of conflict transcends departmental units; A good example is when teachers especially in private schools complain of unrealistic demands of their time by school programme.
- **Organization - environment Conflict:** This type emanates from outside the school system in an attempt to influence policy, and programmes.

- **Inter-personal Conflict:** It stems from personal motives. Interests of persons involved collide and the attempt of each of them to put his interest ahead provokes another's reaction.
- **Inter-group Conflict:** Within the hierarchies, departments and along lines of personal interest, groups are formed in organizations. The "old guards" for example, may go head-to-head with "young activities".
- **Intra-group Conflict:** Here, an hitherto harmonious group splits to groups opposed on an issue or a number of issues. This can degenerate to embittered relationship typical of fractions in staff or students union.
- **Interpersonal Conflict:** This is when a person-environment social fit is unusual and the behavioural outcome trigger trouble for him and others.
- **Inter-informal System Conflict:** Members of each informal group often develop and sometimes manifestly express criticism of other groups. Such conflicts that put informal system against one another are usually detrimental to cooperative actions.
- **Informal System - Environment Conflict:** Informal levels of action in the organization can conflict with pressures from external environment. For an example, every organizational man struggles with pressure from family and communal groups for more quality time and commitment.

Others as enunciated by Nnabuo et al. (2006) include:

**Status Incongruence** This refers to a situation where a person feels that the role given to him is beneath his status. For example, if a personnel is well trained and the job assigned to them is one requiring minimum ability, conflict sets in as the personnel feels that the role is not commensurate with his level of learning and exposure.

**Role-Norm conflict:** This is formal versus informal organization conflicts. It is caused by the overlapping of goals of the informal into that of the formal.

**Role overload:** This is a situation in which the role expectations are far higher than the available time and capacity of personnel.

**Role Ambiguity:** This arises as a result of vague or inadequate definition of role expectation and role prescription.

### **Causes of Conflicts in Organizations**

Many factors are responsible for the generation and emergence of conflict in human institutions. Some of them are identified by Wilson (2010, pp. 138-139) namely:

- Competition (power or domination).
- Lack of information. This problem may also include the introduction of new information, contradictory information dissemination, incomplete information and even misinformation emanating from the rumour or propaganda mill or grapevine. Inefficient transmission and relay system also account for the difficulty.
- Conflict in values, cross cultural communication problems are manifestations of this.

- Insufficient resource: Here, there is a near intense competition for limited resources.
- Individual personality clashes: This may manifest in “my-ego-is-bigger than-yours” situation.
- Struggle for survival and advancement in the same space which has its roots in structural organizational conflict.
- Inter/intra organizational issues such as relationship with parent bodies/proprietors and instability in policies and interference from outside.
- Union /labour issues such as funding, salaries and staff conditions of service, play and important and critical role in higher education.
- Disciplinary problems: Staffs who are facing disciplinary action tend to act as conflict incubators even when they were involved in such outrageous offences such as sorting and negligence of duty.
- Conflict of interest: is may take the form of a face-off between government/proprietor and management on the one hand and the unions on the other.
- Other problems include emotional disturbance, dislike of the leadership structure, aloofness of the senior management teams poor leadership style, long lines, of communication and incompetence on the part of institutional officials, among others.

Therefore, conflicts originate from multitude of sources found at personal and organizational levels in institutions. The following levels are identified with each of them being interaction either:

- Within and between informal organizational levels or
- Within or between formal organizational levels or
- Between formal and informal organizational levels.

The import of the explanation here is that every institution has potentialities that spark off conflict and these potentialities are found both within and outside the organization.

### **Strategies to Conflict Management**

Conflict management is the handling and treatment of conflicts in such a way as to reduce its destructive effects to the barest minimum (Best, 2000). Conflicts are inevitable in every establishment. The challenge therefore, is not in avoiding it or seeking to eliminate it as these could be futile but to deal with it in such a manner that it will not affect the stability and progress of the organization. It is important to state that conflicts stem from a misunderstanding resulting from misunderstanding resulting from a distorted or misconstrued perception. The scholars recommend conflict resolution methods to include:

- Mediation;
- Settlement;
- Adjudication;
- Diplomacy;
- Negotiation; and
- Communication.



The scholar further contends that the preferred approaches should be negotiation, dialogue and mediation because they end with “win-win” outcome. Suggestion for resolving or minimizing conflicts varies depending on the situations. What may be logical approach for handling conflicts of Theory Y employees may not be appropriate for Theory X persons. Blake et al. (1964) in Ereh (2011) have identified several generalized approaches to resolving conflicts as: withdrawing and retreating from the conflict, smoothing or playing down the differences and emphasizing the values held in common. Compromising or bargaining to search for intermediate positions, forcing by having one party impose its set of values on the other and confronting the conflict with open exchange of information and working through the differences so that both sides can win. Mbipom (2000:96) feels that effective communication, good record keeping and provision of systematic job description, job specification, or job manuals are some of the methods for minimizing role ambiguity and role conflict in secondary schools. Follet in Mbipom (2000) believed strongly that it is the duty of the administrator to ensure that conflicts are resolved. Where conflict is properly understood and handled, it may present an opportunity for growth. Scholar submits that conflicts may be resolved in any of the three ways namely: domination, compromise or integration. Morphet et al. (2003) contends that the best way to deal with conflicts is through integration.

The scholars further claimed that conflict is destructive when it increases social disorganization or is damaging to an individual’s personality. Conflict can be constructive when it can be seen as an impetus for growth in human relations and for bringing about desired changes (Mbipoifl, 2000). Evans (1993) in Wilson (2010) has outlined some key elements of successful conflict management to include:

- Strict Fairness and impartially;
- Trustworthy and sensitivity approach to gain confidence;
- Even-handed examination of each party’s position;
- Identifying root cause and deciding on corrective actions;
- Enforceable and fir outcomes;
- Acceptable conflict resolution and conflict minimization;
- Monitoring resolution and agreement;
- Transfer/job-role change may be necessary.

It is pertinent to state that each of these approaches or strategies have their merits and demerits and can be utilized at various levels of conflict, it therefore behooves on the manager of formal organization to properly assess the situation and level of conflict before choosing any resolution approach.

### **Managing Organization Roles and Conflicts**

Conflicts often arise as a result of discrepancies or differences between role expectation and role perceptions hence a principal administrator or manager must ensure that these discrepancies are minimized. Similarly, it is important that a principal understands the role conflicts before delving into resolving the issue. This helps a lot as a proper understanding of a role will help in proffering a better diagnosis for the resolution of the conflict when it arises. In a nutshell, managing roles and conflicts involves the following:

- Clearly defining roles;
- Identifying roles and role problems;
- Analyzing the role problems-this brings about harmony in role expectations and performance and helping to eliminate role ambiguity and prevent conflicts;
- Reduction in role ambiguity, this involves setting clear goals and properly outlining roles;
- Ensuring collaboration among personnel so as to avoid distrust and bickering;
- Proper and judicious allocation of scarce resources;
- Timely intervention to stem conflicts before it becomes full blown.

## CONCLUSION

Every organization spells out roles to every member of staff and a proper portrayal of such roles goes a long way to improve the standing of the organization. However, roles are not immune to problems hence, conflicts arise as a result of contending forces within and outside their role. Managing roles and conflicts is an important part of every organization and it involves clearly defining roles and as much, as possible reduces role ambiguity. Similarly, in managing conflicts, managers must study the various strategies and apply the most effective for a particular role conflict.

## Suggestions

The discrepancies between role expectation and role perception are one of the leading causes of conflict. Based on this, it was recommended that:

- Organizational roles should be properly defined to avoid conflicting institutions leading to conflicts;
- School Managers should ensure that their staff are carried along so as to avoid distrust and conflicts.
- Goals should be central so that personnel will not be working at cross purposes thus endangering organizational goals.
- Resources should be properly apportioned to avoid unnecessary competitions which may lead to conflicts.
- When conflicts arise, care must be taken to apply the most suitable strategy as no strategy is the best for all problems.

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