



CONFLICT AND ITS RESOLUTION AN EXPERIENTIAL APPROACH

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Abstract: *One of the paradoxes of man's earthly existence is the ubiquity of social strife, conflict and wars. These concepts are coterminous terms and will be used inter-changeably in this paper. Conflict is endemic in the nature of man. One of the early political thinkers, Thomas Hobbes pointed out that men voluntarily and willingly entered into civil society for the purpose of preserving their lives and avoid conflict the war of everyone against everyone". But the irony of it is that conflict (war or civil strife) has become a recurring social decimal in human history. Yet humanity needs peace for its progress, it happiness, and above all its raison. This paper seeks to examine Conflict and Its Resolution an Experiential Approach. The paper has attempted to provide a practical guide to the understanding of the basic rudiments of conflict. It has defined and described conflict and the types of conflict. In addition conflict resolution and conflict management were highlights and conceptualized. The paper similarly examined some theories of social conflict in order to provide a better understanding of conflict and its likely causes in any society. Dispute resolution and management is another important area focused on by the paper. In the end analysis, the paper attempted to draw attention to the utility of conflict handling styles and prevention strategies. This paper finally, concluded that Conflict resolution in Nigeria requires honest and capable leadership oppression, domination and marginalization and raise; the standard of living of all Nigerians.*

Keywords: *Conflict and Its Resolution an Experiential Approach*

INTRODUCTION

One of the paradoxes of man's earthly existence is the ubiquity of social strife, conflict and wars. These concepts are coterminous terms and will be used inter-changeably in this paper. Conflict is endemic in the nature of man. One of the early political thinkers, Thomas Hobbes pointed out that men voluntarily and willingly entered into civil society for the purpose of preserving their lives and avoid conflict the war of everyone against everyone". But the irony of it is that conflict (war or civil strife) has become a recurring social decimal in human history. Yet humanity needs peace for its progress, it happiness, and above all its raison.

The question is how can this paradox be explained? The simple explanation could be couched on the reality of things generally, and in the human nature. Some great minds in history have

reflected on the reality of things and affirmed the inevitability of conflicts, including social conflicts. For Heraclitus, adapted in Chikendu (2002 p. 112) strife is the parent of things. It is the nature of all realities. Raif Darendorf, a sociologist in Chikendu (2002) stated that "Every society displays at every point *dessensus and conflict, social conflict is ubiquitous*".

There is also to be considered the reality of human nature. Man is essentially a selfish animal concerned primarily with his self-preservation. It is paradoxically in his bid to preserve himself that man makes war in the prosecution of which he stands a great risk of losing his life.

This paper looks at conflict types of conflict, conflict resolution theories of social conflict, conflict resolution management and conflict handling styles among other. The questions and issues

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addressed here are of practical import, affecting, in a very direct way, the well-being of the peoples of our various societies.

Conflict: Conceptual Clarification

Scholars and writers of various shades of opinion have attempted in their own way to give a definition of conflict and its concomitant threat to peace and security. It is difficult to define conflict with appropriateness. The concept conflict is as controversial as the name implies and has been subjected to social, economic, political and cultural connotations and interpretations by various scholars. The controversy is most a result of lack of unanimity and scholars and writers as to what the concept specially means. While some scholars perceive conflict as synonymous with crises, some others link it to dispute among or between different people-individuals or groups which is an inevitable fact of life in our societies.

For the fact that human beings live together and exchange ideas in a society and also try to influence each other's views concerning certain issues of interest there is bound to be misunderstanding and disagreement among them which may eventually lead to conflict. Conflict therefore, is inevitable among human beings as pointed out earlier. This is particularly true and glaring when people with different historical experiences, different cultural values, varying economic conditions and political systems are brought together under a system. In this circumstance, there is bound to be conflict.

Whenever there is politics, we discover conflict and ways in which human beings cope with conflict, conflict could be referred to as a situation of goal incompatibility between individuals or groups (Best 2005, p.20). It is a necessary characteristic of a modern society. The reason for conflict is that societies are made up of individuals from different socio-economic, political, cultural and educational backgrounds that have different ideas about what should be done with the resources available in the environment. They develop and express their concerns about resources allocation and control in different ways and through different institutions. Sometimes they observe different norms or rules concerning the ways in which they should pursue their interests they act with different degrees of feelings with different intensives of commitment.

Since different individuals and groups have diverse interest the aims of some groups will definitely conflict with others. In other words, conflict cannot be totally eradicated in any particular

society but can only be minimized. According to Angaye, conflict refers to disputes, disagreements, quarrels, struggles, fights and wars between individuals, groups and countries. In other words, conflict can be seen as a struggle between two or more forces that create tension that must be resolved. It is a kind of disagreement, collision, strife and argument, a mental struggle arising from opposing demands or impulses or at its apogee a battle/war between two or more persons. Ukoazie and Yamshon (1998) opined that conflict is in

A sense, whether real or perceived, by one entity that its primary self-interest are being threatened by another entity.

The end result of this threat is that the entity could acquire, neutralize or destroy the competing entity's interest in order to promote its own self-interests. Berelson and Steiner in Nathan (2005) defined conflict as

The pursuit of incompatible goals, such that gains to one side comes about at the expenses of the other although perhaps it is not necessary that one side "lose" in the absolute sense.

Some scholars view conflict as an opposition of interest between and among various individuals and social groups which may or may not breakout into open dispute or physical violence. Some see conflict as a breakdown of diplomacy. Richard Clutterpack a retired British General conceptualized conflict in terms of violence and militarism arising from over reaction to provocation to perceived injury and/or injustice.

All these views go to show that conflicts are situations of crisis, violence, rage, outrage, instability, pogrom, general insecurity, cataclysm, war and so on. Conflict is an ill wind and everybody is within its ambit of destruction. To eliminate crises and volatile situations, many scholars have asserted that attempts at reduction of crises will amount to efforts in futility unless the causes are identified and dealt with.

The Marxist school of thought conceives the causes of conflict in terms of clash of interests of the oppressors and the oppressed, the plunders and the deprived, imperialist agents and the fighters for the sovereign rights of the oppressed (Njoku and Anele 2005, p. 13). These views go to prove that conflict is as old as man and exists in every society whether primitive or modern. Though every generation recognizes the effects of conflict on human community only peace and development, the pursuit of its panacea and or curtailment has remained most elusive. Today conflict resolution is the greatest headache of all nations



singularly and collectively, defying numerous conceivable solutions.

Conflicts, once it exists may end up in violence. It can also serve as an avenue for change of attitudes, perception and interests of the combatants, which can lead to either peaceful. Co-existence or aggravation of such conflicts, transforming them into civil disobedience and outright war: It is a situation that arises if ideas, beliefs and opinions do not come to consensus.

Functional and dysfunctional Conflict

Functional conflict which is also known as creative conflict refers to a constructive form of conflict that supports the goals of the society or organization and improves performance. This type benefits or supports the main purpose of the society or organization. Angaye expressed that functional conflict reflects the differences and variety of human opinions and activity which exist in any free society. He went further to assert that if constructive conflicts between groups which are major sources of innovation, new ideas institutions and social change are suppressed altogether, a national becomes stagnant and static.

On the other hand, dysfunctional conflicts are destructive forms of conflicts that hinder organizational performance. This type of conflict in any given society could lead to serious damage, destruction and causes loss of lives, property, investment opportunities and so on when open violence, wars, mass strikes and other forms of disruption occur. This type is undesirable in any organization or society and therefore, should be greatly minimized if not completely eradicated. Having had a working idea of what conflict is all about let us quickly look at the types of conflict that exist in a society, particularly in Nigeria and other African Countries.

TYPES OF' CONFLICT

Scholars and writers have identified two major types of conflict. These are Integrate and Intrastate Conflicts. Intrastate Conflict refers to Conflicts that originate from the Nigerian Civil War of 1967-1970. While interstate conflicts are those between two independent states as the one between Britain and Argentina in the late 1990s.

Categories of Intrastate Conflict

Under this we have

a) **Family/Domestic Conflict:** This type of conflict arises from difference in marriage, child custody; property (owning and

sharing), responsibility sharing among others. These originate and are contained within the context of a formal relationship.

b) **Traditional Conflicts:** These are very common in our various traditional societies. Traditional conflict originates from institutions structures, values that are built on long-held cherished beliefs and practices of identifiable ethnic groups. They generally revolve around traditional institutions. Examples are chieftaincy; land/property disputes; customary practices; ethnic/traditional associations.

c) **Religious Conflicts:** These are conflicts that emanate from the clash between adherents of different faith's such as intra Christian, Christians vs Muslims; intra-Muslim; traditionalist vs Christian/Muslim.

d) **Economic/Social Conflicts:** This type usually emanates from interactions based on economic value or social relationships such as distribution of resources; development projects; general differences-youths/aged; gender issues, class etc.

e) **Political Conflicts:** Political conflict is most common in a democratic setting or environment which results from differences in opinion, ideology and preferences over social issues and leadership. These may result from elections voting process (post election violence in Kaduna and other states in the North). Political party membership, political apartments; government (in power) polices and intra-party disputes.

Likely Sources of Conflict

i) **Domestic System of conversance:** One potential sources of conflict is the types of exercise of government power or the system or method of government. In Nigeria for instance, between 1983 and 1998.military rule as a system of government created so much tension and conflict between the people and leadership. The university campus were not left out where the style of administration often led to conflict between students and administration management and the unions (ASUU and NASU), sometimes between the Union and the government of the day; distribution of resources (where imbalance is perceived to be preferential).

ii) **Historical Legacies:** Legacies of misrule abound in most African countries which have led to numerous wars in the continent. It is believed that there are currently about 18 active wars and armed conflicts at different levels of intensity, though some of them are at different stages of civil war peace settlements, and about 36 different conflicts going on in Africa. Some of these



conflicts are traceable to historical legacy of colonialism, slave trade, expansionist tendencies, misrule among others.

iii) Identity: The mobilization of people in communal identity groups based on race, religion, culture etc. every human being needs to actualize himself. This is also applicable to groups within the society who often sought recognition for themselves on certain characteristics like population, education, economic power to the detriment of others. This behaviour has led to issues of domination, ethnic cleansing among others, pushing the identity of one social group against the interest of other lead to conflict.

iv) External Factors: Conflicts in some societies sometimes can be traced to the over bearing influence or intervention of external groups in the affairs of that society.

v) Competition for Power: Leaders of political parties and other individuals and groups often express their ascension to power, they employ all sorts of means, either by hook or crook to acquire power which in most cases lead to conflict.

vi) Corruption/Fraud: In some cases, leaders are accused of mismanagement of resources and funds and in a bid to rescue the organization from such leaders or in an attempt to call for accountability, conflict ensues.

Other sources of conflict will include (a) challenges to democracy; (b) Electoral conflicts (c) constitutional matters (d) human rights issues and (e) student authority relationship.

Theories of Social Conflict

Extensive write-ups have been made on the nature, causes and the impact of conflicts by scholars. Several schools of thought have offered various explanations that tended to place much emphasis on one particular or a set of related theories, while diminishing the importance or explanatory relevance of other favourably competing theories. Attempts will be made here to briefly look at some of these theories by some scholars in order to provide frameworks for understanding conflict, particularly the causes of conflict and the Conditions under which it occurs. Let us now turn to these theories, we begin with.

Structural Conflict Theory

The main tenet or crux of the structural conflict theory is couched on the premise that conflict is built into the particular ways societies are structured and organized. The proponents of this theory look at social problems like political and economic exclusion, injustice, poverty, disease, exploitation, inequity

among others as sources of conflict. They maintain that conflicts occur as a result of the exploitative and unjust nature of human societies, domination of one class by another etc. Karl Marx, Mao Tse Tsung, Friedrich Engels, Lenin are among the supporters of this theory.

Realist Theories

This theory anchors on inherency and traces the root cause of conflict in a society to a flaw in human nature which is seen to be selfish and engaging in the pursuit of personalized self interest defined as power. This theory looks at the apparent weakness and individualism and concludes that the starting point for the explanation of conflict is the individual level.

The realist theory in the first instance sees the world as an arena of conflict. Secondly realism seeks to show that there are genetic defects which push human kind into behaving negatively (Koestler, 1967) and that wars become inevitable because there is no mechanism to stop them from occurring (Watt, 1959p. 232). And thirdly is the argument that decision makers — individuals, groups or nations, have a moral justification to defend their basic interests and ensure self-preservation using any means necessary.

Frustration-Aggression Theory

The explanation of conflict as expressed by this theory seemed to be the most common explanation for violent behaviour stemming from inability to fulfill needs. The major argument of the frustration - aggression theory is that aggression is not just undertaken as a natural reaction or instinct, but that it is the fail out or outcome of frustration and that in a situation where the legitimate desires of an individual is denied either directly or by the indirect consequence of the way the society is structured, the feeling of disappointment may lead such a person to express its anger through violence that will be directly or indirectly related to them (Ademda,2005p.35).

Human Needs Theory

The main assumption of this theory, just like the frustration-aggression theory, is that all human beings have some basic human needs which they seek to fulfill, and that the denial and frustration of these needs by other groups or individuals could affect them immediately or later, thereby leading to conflict (Roseti et al., 1990).

Human needs theory seeks to get at the root of conflict, and to explore and respond to the reasons for protest and deviant behaviour that tend to generate conflict. The theory assumes that



if there is to be development and conforming behaviour, these needs have to be satisfied. Any policy that neglects human needs thus cannot but generate protest behaviour and conflict.

Systemic Theories

This theory provides a socio-cultural outlook and explanation for the emergence of violent conflicts. The theory posits that reasons for any social conflict lie in the social context within which it occurs. Examples of systemic causes of conflict are changes in people's material comfort, including environmental degradation that reduces access to sources of livelihood, uncontrolled population growth especially in urban centres, resource, scarcity and its allocation through lopsided political processes and competition, breakdown of cherished values and traditions that play crucial social control functions, widespread poverty in the midst of plenty, the domination and marginalization of minority groups by those in majority and ethnicity.

There are other theories trying to explain conflict and the causes of conflict, but this is the much we can consider for the purpose of this paper. However, it should be noted that these theories are not without their shortcomings. But despite the limitations or shortcomings of each of these theories, they offer practical and some useful perspective to the understanding of conflict.

Conflict Resolution

Conflict resolution is concerned with processes of removing tensions between individuals, groups and states or maintaining them at levels consistent with continued peaceful pursuit of their goals. Conflict resolution, in our contemporary society, is the greatest headache of all nations singularly and collectively, defying numerous conceivable solutions. "*Conflict resolution, as miller (2003 p.8) puts it is; a variety of approaches aimed at terminating conflicts through the constructive solving of problems, distinct from management or transformation of conflict*".

When we talk of conflict resolution, we refer to a situation of expectation that the deep rooted sources of conflict are addressed and resolved, and behaviour is no longer violent, nor are attitudes hostile any longer, while the structure of conflict has changed (Miall et al, 2001 p.21). For Mitchel and banks (1996) conflict resolution refers to:

(i) An outcome in which the issues in an existing conflict are satisfactorily dealt with through a solution that is mutually acceptable to the parties, self-sustaining in the long run and

productive of a new, positive relationship between parties that were previously hostile adversaries ; and

(ii) Any process or procedure by which such an outcome is achieved. Some scholars sometimes see conflict resolution as a specialized field of study and practice as in the field of conflict resolution. While some others refer to it as a study of decision making in order to resolve an issue of dispute. However, it should be noted that the study of conflict resolution cannot be reduced to a detailed study of decision making, even if we could obtain all the information, perceptions, interpretations, and alternative choices available to decision makers and for a more diffuse project for guiding decision makers. Decisions are often deeply relevant to conflict, but such decisions are only part of the context and content of a conflict and its resolution. Explicitly, conflict resolution can be sufficed to mean a situation of "End of the road" where the parties to a conflict are mutually satisfied with the outcome of a settlement and the conflict is resolved in a true sense. Some conflicts are permanently resolvable like conflict over resource.

Conflict Management Conflict management is concerned with the ways and means of controlling and harmonizing conflictual relationships within an interaction process. It concerns the way in which events, especially the stresses and strains in the relations between individuals, groups and nations, are controlled to ensure some harmony between the parties concerned (Imobishe, 2003, pJ) conflict management is also "concerned with ways or the process of reducing the negative and destructive capacity of conflict through a number of measures and by working with and through the parties involved in that conflict. It covers the entire area of handling conflicts positively at different stages, including the efforts made to prevent conflict by being proactive (Best 2005, p.93). It seeks to promote the use of nonviolent approaches to conflict.

DISPUTE RESOLUTION AND MANAGEMENT

Some scholars, in their own way, have attempted to treat conflict resolution as distinct from conflict management. They see conflict management as a means of preventing the escalation of conflict rather than resolving it (Burton, 1990, p.3). This distinction seems only to apply, if one limits himself 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 of friction and the creation of a propitious atmosphere for harmonious relationships (Imobighe, 2003, p.3). This being the case let us now consider some elements in the process of dispute resolution and management. Let us begin with the use of:

(a) Mediation: This involves the use of an assistance by a third party, who is regarded as the mediator, where the parties to a conflict admit to having a problem which they are both committed to resolving. In this case, the mediator manages a negotiation process, but does not impose a solution on the parties. This is a voluntary process in which the parties retain control over the outcome.

(b) Conciliation: A process in which the third party tries to bring the conflicting parties to agreement through improving communications between them, and exploring avenues toward a peaceful settlement. Conciliation involves facilitation of 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 (Imobighe, 2003, p.6).

(c) Collaboration: The process whereby the parties to a conflict work together on their own to resolve problems through constructive dialogue or other activities like joint projects, sharing of community schools and health centres etc. This helps to build trust, confidence and mutual respect.

(d) Arbitration: Another type of third party intervention in a conflict situation and management is arbitration. This is almost like mediation but a little higher and possesses more power than mediation. Arbitration as a conflict resolution technique involves the use and assistance of a neutral third party in conflict, who hears or listens to the evidence from both parties, and thereafter, renders a decision, usually called an award, which is expected to be binding on the parties.

(e) Negotiation: This involves a process of dialogue between the parties in conflict about serious issues of interest in which their opinions differ. It is the process whereby the parties within the conflict seek to settle or resolve their differences or conflict which involves dialogue and discussion by the conflicting parties. Negotiation can only take place when there is communication between the parties.

(f) Communication: Communication is a very important element in peace building. It is the process of sharing and exchanging useful information between individuals, groups, and potential parties in a conflict situation. When conflicting parties share and exchange information between them, doubt, suspicion and distrust are removed and confidence is built in the peace process.

(g) Adjudication: The use of the court and litigation process to settle dispute between conflicting parties. Adjudication is a non-violent method of resolving conflict in this case conflicting parties may decide to take their case to a court of law, before a judge of competent jurisdiction. At the end of the hearing process, the court gives a judgment that is legally binding of both conflicting parties.

CONFLICT HANDLING STYLES

A society experiencing series of conflict can adopt some of the handling styles identified by Ojiji (2005 p.121 -124) in managing conflict situations. These are:

(i) Avoidance: occurs when one party involved in a conflict situation ignores the conflicting issues or denies the significance of the issue in their life. This is a subtle way of trying not to address the problem at stake, or a tactical way of postponing the conflict for a better time, which may or may not come. In this case, one party may be unassertive and uncooperative, with no intention of pursuing one's own needs or those of the other party.

(ii) Accommodation: This style of handling conflict emanates from the cooperative tendency or disposition of one of the parties to a conflict. The person to a potential conflict adopting this style may be unassuming, unassertive and may even not be interested in competition with the other party. But rather consciously attempts to neglect or fore-go his own needs and focuses on satisfying those of the other party. In this situation, in order to accommodate the needs of the other party, he makes some personal sacrifices to allow peace to reign between them.

(iii) Collaborating: This style of handling conflict involves the assertive and cooperative posture of the parties to the conflict. The conflicting parties, here, work together so as to find lasting solution that is satisfactory to both parties. This involves dialogue and discussion between the parties.

(iv) Compromising and Consensus: In this situation, the parties involved in a conflict, after dialoguing and discussion, given room for resolving such conflict by willingly ceding



certain rights to one another and by accepting that no-one actually ever gets all at the same in human relationship. Parties make concessions in order to resolve the conflict.

(v) **Confrontation/Fighting:** This concretizes when the conflicting parties resort to physical or emotional attack on each other. Threats to each other, insults, or generally engaging in violent acts such as hitting the other party characterize this style. There is clearly lack of understanding between the parties that may lead to destruction or injury to the parties involved. This style cannot, however, offer a lasting solution to the conflict, but may rather aggravate the situation after confrontation.

(vi) **Problem-Solving:** This is another form of dialoguing and discussion where the parties to a conflict constructively listen to each other in order to understand the underlying factors in the conflict and to deal with the issues. This style of handling conflict in most cases, often lead to a show of respect for their differences and make them look for ways to resolve the problem. What is right or wrong in this case is not given priority but, rather parties consider conflict as an opportunity to improve relationship between themselves.

CONFLICT PREVENTION STRATEGIES

As stated earlier in this paper, conflict in any society is ever endemic. It is impossible for any society in the world to reach a state of absolute peace. Conflicts either within or between persons or groups would remain till a new world emerges.

Prevention strategy is regarded as a set of proactive process aimed at identifying potential sources of conflict and taking measures to preempt them. The following strategies should be put in place to work at conflict.

(a) Public Education (b) observance of human rights (c) Good governance (d) consensus/compromising (e) access to information.

CONCLUSION

The paper has attempted to provide a practical guide to the understanding of the basic rudiments of conflict. It has defined and described conflict and the types of conflict. In addition conflict resolution and conflict management were highlights and conceptualized. The paper similarly examined some theories of social conflict in order to provide a better understanding of conflict and its likely causes in any society. Dispute resolution and management is another important area focused on by the paper. In the end analysis, the paper attempted to draw attention to the

utility of conflict handling styles and prevention strategies. The paper however, is meant to serve as guide to people grappling with conflict issues and the procedures for its management and or resolution. Conflict resolution in Nigeria requires honest and capable leadership oppression, domination and marginalization and raise; the standard of living of all Nigerians.

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