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CONFLICT MANAGEMENT PRACTICES IN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS: THE CASE OF UNIVERSITY FOR DEVELOPMENT STUDIES CENTRAL ADMINISTRATION, GHANA

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to evaluate conflict management practices and the main causes of conflict in the university administration in Ghana. The researcher used quantitative methods to classify variables in the study and administered questionnaires as tools to enable accurate data collection. The target population for the research included management staff, senior staff and junior staff at the University for Development Studies UDS central administration in Tamale, Ghana. The study revealed that the causes of conflict at the UDS central administration were conflicting needs, conflicting perception, conflicting goals, conflicting roles, tribalism and nepotism. The strengths and weaknesses of the processes and procedures in conflict management and resolution were discovered with the view to recommend ways of improvement. The findings may draw the attention of policy makers and other stakeholders to various issues in the conflict management and resolution processes in public universities on how to address problematic issues. The study may also highlight the processes and quality procedures for conflict resolution in the tertiary institutions. The paper's originality is reflected by the use of management staff, senior staff and junior staff which have not been previously used, to investigate university conflict management in the study area.

INTRODUCTION

Conflicts have become part and parcel of human organizations world over. This indeed is a paradox because of the amount of energy and resources expended by organizations to prevent and resolve conflicts. As cited in the study of Olaleye, &Arogundade (2013), conflict is a situation of disagreement between two parties characterized by the inability of those concerned to iron out their differences. The inevitability of conflict was also established so managing conflicts immediately could be in the best interest of the conflicting parties in particular and the organization in general (Bazezew, 2014). It is therefore not an aberration to expect conflicts in the Central Administration of the UDS. The nature and types of conflicts that occur in UDS Central Administration vary from one department to another.

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Most recent study identified conflict within an organization to include personal differences, lack of clear job descriptions and responsibilities, role incompatibility and organizational issues such as high levels of stress, resource scarcity and job uncertainty as the most common sources of conflicts (Pavlakis, Kaitelidou, Theodorou, Galanis, Sourtzi, &Siskou, 2011). As such successful conflict management can be beneficial in terms of increasing public trust in decision-making (Young *et al.* 2012). Conflict is a part of 'doing business' when people work together. Recent research differentiate conflict as either task conflict, or relationship otherwise known as interpersonal conflict. While task conflict is about opposing views of team members towards the task, including viewpoints, ideas, and thoughts, that of relationship conflict is the interpersonal incompatibilities, which include tension, animosity, and annoyance (Jia-Chi, 2010; Bazezew, 2014). Conflict is a part of organizational life and may occur between individuals, between the individual and the group, and between groups. The domain of work and organisation constitutes an arena in which diverging aims and interests provide an inexhaustible

source of conflict at local, national and international levels. The interpersonal type of conflict, which may be attributed to miscommunication, was found to be the most common type of conflict among workers (Zakari *et al*., 2010; Pavlakis *et al*., 2011). Conflict may emerge between different organisations or within organisations, or between organisations and their social and political environments. As cited in Pavlakis *et al*. (2011), most definitions agree that conflict is a process involving two or more people, where a person perceives the opposition of the other. Conflict is a vital thing in any organization including higher education institutions which mostly takes place between the faculty and administration.

There are workers with different qualifications in Ghanaian tertiary educational institutions which could bring about personality conflicts. Morrison (2010) opines that this may involve people with low academic qualifications who have stayed on the job for a longer period of time, as against those with high qualifications, but have been on the job for a relatively short period. Organisations and their constituent individuals face turmoil and turbulence induced by events external and internal to them. Examples are failing management, aggressive market strategies, worker exploitation and discrimination (for reasons of gender, age, ethnic affiliation or physical disability), but also accidents and disasters, to name but a few. Although theoretical and empirical research has largely increased our knowledge of intra- and inter-organisational conflict. As much as conflict can promote innovation, creativity and the development of new ideas that make institutional growth feasible, it can also delay or prevent the achievement of institutional objectives and personal goals, therefore may be unproductive (Chen, Li, & Lin, 2013; Morrison 2010; Carlsson-Wall, Kraus, & Lind, 2011). Conflict may be defined as a struggle between people with opposing views, needs, ideas, beliefs, values, or goals. Conflict, according to Redpath *et al*. (2013) is a situation where two or more parties with strongly held opinions clash over conservation objectives and when one party is perceived to assert its interests at the expense of another. In their view, conflict can be real or imagined which can be strengthened or weakened over time, this means that however process it takes, it can be handled or managed.

Studies assert that businesses nowadays are operating in a turbulent environment where organisations are searching for measures that will allow them to improve their performance and competitiveness. Conflict is generally regarded as disagreement regarding interests or ideas (Sundqvist, Kyläheiko, Kuivalainen, &Cadogan, 2012; Anderson, Osseichuk, & Illingworth, 2010; Eggers, Kraus, &Covin, 2014). In addition, organisational conflict is regarded as the discord that occurs when the goals, interests or values of different individuals or groups are incompatible with those of individuals or groups block or frustrate each other's in an attempt to achieve their objectives. Conflicts are inevitable part of organisation since the goals of different stakeholders such as managers and staff are often incompatible. Conflict is an ever-present process in human relations. That is why various organisations change their approaches to enable them to manage their organisations effectively to avoid conflicts at all costs. Conflict is a fact of life in any organisation as long as people compete for jobs, resources, power, recognition and security. Also, dealing with conflict is a great challenge to management (Woodrow, & Guest, 2014; Fisher, 2016). Conflicts commonly arise when employees interact in

organisations and compete for scarce resources. Employees in various organisations are organized into manageable groups in order to achieve common goal, therefore, the probability of conflict to arise is very high. Nowadays, most serious conflicts make headlines in the newspapers, which might affect the public image of the company. Conflicts have both negative (dysfunctional) and positive (functional) outcomes to the individual employees and the organization at large. There is no one source of conflict which occurs in organisations at all levels of management (Kiitam, McLay, & Pilli, 2016). In social life, conflicts do occur but they are managed by family members, friends and relatives. The same case applies to organisations, when conflicts arise; it needs to be resolved by management for the sake of the organisational growth, survival and enhance performance. This study focuses on the various causes of conflict at University for Development Studies UDS central administration in the Northern Regional capital of Ghana.

METHODOLOGY

Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used to classify variables in the research. The data collection tools used was the questionnaires. The researcher used questionnaires to enabled accurate data to be collected. The sources of data collection included primary and secondary. Primary data are information that was collected at source and the secondary data are information that are collected and used for another purpose which included journals, articles, and the internet. The target population for the research included management staff, senior staff and junior staff at the UDS central administration. The central administration has a population of 264 out of which 114 were sampled. The sampling method used was probability random sampling which ensures a non-zero chance of each worker being sampled. The researcher collected views and opinions of workers at using stratified random sampling technique.

Sample size: According to Saunders *et al* (2007), "… the final sample size is almost always a matter of judgement as well as a calculation".

An appropriate sample size was determined using the formular below,

$$n = \frac{Z_{\alpha/2}{}^2 P(1-P)}{e^2}$$

Where $Z_{\alpha/2}$ is the upper $\alpha/2$ point of the normal distribution, P is the estimated population proportion, and e is the margin of error.

The following estimates were used; α=0.05, $Z_{\alpha/2}$=1.96, P=95%, and e=0.4.

Hence, $n = \dfrac{1.96^2(0.95)(1-0.95)}{0.4^2} \cong 114$

The sample size (114) is 43.18% of the total population (264). Out of the 36 management staff, 16 were selected for the survey. Out of 68 senior staff, 29 of them were sampled and out of 160 junior staff, 69 were sampled, thus, in the ratio 1:1.8:4.3 of management staff, senior staff, and junior staff respectively. These allocations were done proportional to size.

FINDINGS

The analysis seeks to evaluate the causes of conflict at the UDS central administration in Tamale, Ghana. The participants were made up of the staff of the central administration of the university. The causes of conflict are presented in this section of the study.

conflicting needs, conflicting styles, conflicting perceptions, conflicting goals, conflicting pressures, and conflicting roles. Table 2 represents the respondents' views on whether or not they have ever been involved in conflict with the head of department or any other employee in the organisation. Out of the 112(100%) respondents, 72(64.3%) said they have never been in conflict with anybody in the organisation whilst

Table 1. Main Causes of Conflict

Rank of Respondents' in the Organisation	The main causes of conflict in respondents organisation					Total
	Conflicting Needs	Conflicting Perception	Conflicting Goals	Conflicting Roles	Other	
Senior Member	6	4	0	5	1	16
	37.5%	25.0%	.0%	31.2%	6.2%	100.0%
Senior Staff	6	10	2	10	1	29
	20.7%	34.5%	6.9%	34.5%	3.4%	100.0%
Junior Staff	15	16	11	21	4	67
	22.4%	23.9%	16.4%	31.3%	6.0%	100.0%
Total	27	30	13	36	6	112
	24.1%	26.8%	11.6%	32.1%	5.4%	100.0%

Source: Field Data, 2011

Table 2. Participants History of Conflict With Head of Department or Employees

Rank of Respondents' in the Organisation	Views of Respondents' on whether or not he/she has been in conflict with the head of department or any other employee in the organisation		Total
	Yes	No	
Senior Member	7	9	16
	43.8%	56.2%	100.0%
Senior Staff	9	20	29
	31.0%	69.0%	100.0%
Junior Staff	24	43	67
	35.8%	64.2%	100.0%
Total	40	72	112
	35.7%	64.3%	100.0%

Source: Field Data, 2011

Table 3. Participants Experienced of Conflict

Rank of Respondents' in the Organisation	The nature of conflict Respondent has experienced in the organisation			Total
	interpersonal conflict	role conflict	interdepartmental conflict	
Senior Member	5	7	1	13
	38.5%	53.8%	7.7%	100.0%
Senior Staff	9	10	3	22
	40.9%	45.5%	13.6%	100.0%
Junior Staff	22	11	1	34
	64.7%	32.4%	2.9%	100.0%
Total	36	28	5	69
	52.2%	40.6%	7.2%	100.0%

Source: Field Data, 2011

From Table 1, it could be observed that the main causes of conflict at the UDS central administration were identified as conflicting needs, conflicting perception, conflicting goals, conflicting roles and others (tribalism and nepotism). Out of the 16(100%) of the senior members who were sampled, 6(37%), 4(25.0%), 5(31.2%), and 1(6.2%) were of the view that, conflict at the University were caused by needs of workers, perception, goals, undefined roles, tribalism and nepotism respectively. However, the number of employees sampled for junior staff were 67(100%) and 15(22.4%), 16(23.9%), 11(16.4%), 21(31.3%) and 4(6.0%) of the sampled population said conflicting needs, perception, goals, undefined roles, tribalism and nepotism were the main causes of conflict at the workplace. Out of the 112(100%) workers sampled, 27(24.1%), 30(26.8%), 13(11.6%), 36(32.1%) and 6(5.4%) respectively identified the main causes of conflict at the university as, conflicting needs, perception, goals, undefined roles tribalism and nepotism. The causes of conflict identified by the respondents were in consonance with Bell's (2002) position that conflict in the workplace is as a result of

40(35.7%) of employees sampled said they have in one way or the other been involved in conflict in the organisation. This is possible because the employees come from different backgrounds and as a result see the world from different perspectives. People have different ways of relating with different people at the workplace. This is in consonance with the opinion of Kerzner (1998) that conflicts can occur with anyone and over anything. From Table 3, it could be observed that the nature of conflict that respondents have experienced in the organisation were interpersonal conflict, role conflict and interdepartmental conflict. Out of the 69(100%) of the respondents, 36(52.2%) agreed that interpersonal conflict was the most common cause of conflict in the organisation and this agrees with Bercovitch, (2010) emphasizes that the interaction between individuals with different attitudes, values and needs can produce conflict behaviour and affect organizational performance. Role conflict which constituted the next highest cause of conflict among workers of the UDS central administration over the years affected 28(40.6%) of the respondents. This could contribute to power struggles for

position and causes intentional or unintentional sabotage of behaviour in the organisation. Those respondents who said interdepartmental conflict was the cause of conflict constituted 5(7.2%) and this was the least cause of conflict in the university. However, junior staff and senior staff who formed 22(64.2%) and 7(54.8%) respectively identified interpersonal and role conflicts as the main cause of conflict at the central administration.

DISCUSSION

It is only reasonable to imagine that conflicts will always occur at the workplace. The reasons are not far fetched. Employees come from different backgrounds and as a result see the world from their own perimeters. They have different ways of relating with different people who speak formally both at homes and in our offices. At the office, 'hobby' is work, where as in the house hobby could be football, chess, or any activity that will relax the mind.These are souces of conflict thus, many causes of group conflict. Studies indicate that disagreements stem from differing views of group members since bigger groups big usually have higher amounts of conflict (Bampoh-Addo, &Ansah-Koi, 2015). The group leader's approach also has a direct impact on the level of conflict in a group- If a leader does not show appreciation for the diverse views of group members, conflict can escalate. A climate of conflict involves specific attitudes, such as members that are judging and criticizing others; imposing their will on others; show indifference to the work; try to dominate the group; or are overly rigid and unwilling to listen to others.As such conflict may arise as a result of power struggle between group members (Leibowitz, Bozalek, Van Schalkwyk, &Winberg, 2015). In any organisation, there are many causes of conflicts; however, conflicts within an individual usually arise when a person is uncertain about what task is expected to do, if not clearly defined by the supervisor or the person in charge. Furthermore, if the tasks of individuals working as a group are not clearly defined by the management they will lead to more conflicts, (Rahim, 1992; Black, 2015). Besides, engaging just as two or more workers can also have conflicting styles and perceptions. They may view the same incident in dramatically different ways. Bell (2002) gives an example of what might happen if a new administrative assistant were hired in an organization. One employee might see the new hire as an advantage (one more set of hands to get the job done), while another employee might see the same new hire as an insult (a clear message that the current employees are not performing adequately).

Conflict between individuals may result from role-related pressures. Conflicts would arise between individuals and groups if the goals are not specified for individuals within a group (Rahim, 2017; Duke, 1999; Mohammed, 2011). Additionally, the following are other sources of conflicts within an organisation namely: sharing of resources especially manpower, money materials, equipment and space required among departments. Resources are very scarce, people will always have to compete for them and the end result will lead to conflict. Moyo, (2018) found that interdependent may lead to conflict, this usually occurs when two or more units depend upon one another to complete work of a product especially when a product passes through stages, one unit would complete work in good time, but other unit might delay the outcome of the whole product. The management might blame all units involved at each process which might lead to a

conflict. Incompatible personalities, which are psychological, might affect the employees not to get along with each other and this difficulty might lead to conflicts, which result from formal interactions with other employees (Robbins, 1987;Corr, &Krupić, 2017).Bell (2002) suggests six reasons for conflict in the workplace: conflicting needs, conflicting styles, conflicting perceptions, conflicting goals, conflicting pressures, and conflicting roles. Hart (2000) discusses two additional causes of conflict: different personal values and unpredictable policies.

Whenever workers compete for scarce resources, recognition, and power in the company's social hierarchy (pecking order), conflict can occur. Since everyone requires a share of the resources (office space, supplies, the boss's time, or the budget fund) to complete their jobs (Hart, 2002), it should come as no surprise when the "have-nots" gripe and plot against the "haves" (Bell, 2002).Because individuals are individuals, they differ in the way they approach people and problems. Associates need to understand their own style and learn how to accept conflicting styles. Personality tests, such as Myers-Briggs Personality Type Inventory (MBTI), can help people explore their instinctive personality styles (Bell, 2002). An example of conflicting styles would be where one worker works best in a very structured environment while another worker works best in an unstructured environment. These two workers could easily drive each other crazy if they constantly work in conflict with one another and do not learn to accept one another's work style.Memos, performance reviews, company rumours, hallway comments, and client feedback are sources for conflicting perceptions. What was meant gets lost in a firestorm of responses to perceived wrongs (Bell, 2002). Resentment and conflict can also occur when one department is viewed as more valuable to the organization than others (Mohammed, 2011; George *et al*., 2012; Hart, 2002;Flynn *et al*., 2016).

Employees may have different viewpoints about an incident, plan, or goal. Problems in the workplace can occur when employees are responsible for different duties in achieving the same goal. Take for instance the scenario of a patient being admitted to a hospital. The business office is responsible for documenting financial information and getting paid, whereas the nursing staff is responsible for the patient's physical assessment and immediate admission. Both objectives are important and necessary, but may cause conflict (Bell, 2002; Flynn *et al*., 2016). Hart (2000) offers another example. Imagine a bank teller's dilemma in a situation where he is being given conflicting responsibilities by two of his managers. The head teller has instructed the staff that rapid service is the top priority, whereas the community relations director has instructed the staff that quality customer service is the top priority. One can imagine how quickly problems could arise between the teller and the head teller if speed is sacrificed for quality time with the customer. Conflicting pressures can occur when two or more employees or departments are responsible for separate actions with the same deadline. For example, manager A needs employee A to complete a report by a particular., which is the same deadline that employee B needs employee A to have a machine fixed. In addition, manager B (who does not know the machine is broken) now wants employee B to use the broken machine before that particular time. What is the best solution? The extent to which members of organisation depend on one another to complete task can contribute greatly to conflict (Hart, 2002; Kozlowski

& Chao, 2012; McEvily *et al.*, 2014).Conflicting roles as stated by Hart, (2002) can occur when an employee is asked to perform a function that is outside his job requirements or expertise or another employee is assigned to perform the same job. This situation can contribute to power struggles for territory. This causes intentional or unintentional aggressive or passive-aggressive (sabotage) behaviour. Everyone has experienced situations where employees have wielded their power in inappropriate ways. Conflict can be caused by differing personal values. The impression is that segregation in the workplace leads to gossiping, suspicion, and ultimately, conflict. As such employees need to learn to accept diversity in the workplace and to work as a team (Barak, ;2016; Ozturk, &Tatli, 2016; Hart, 2002; Chan, & Anteby, 2016).

Whenever company policies are changed, inconsistently applied, or non-existent, misunderstandings are likely to occur. Employees need to know and understand company rules and policies; they should not have to guess. Otherwise, unpredictable things can occur such as employees dressing inappropriately or giving out wrong information. The absence of clear policies or policies that are constantly changing can create an environment of uncertainty and conflict (Hart, 2002). From literature, sources of conflicts can be classified into three, namely, competition for scarce resources, drives for autonomy, and goals divergence as a result of differences in opinion (Kiitam, McLay, & Pilli, 2016;Chiumento, Khan, Rahman, & Frith, 2016). Ivancevich (1996) identified four factors that contribute to conflicts. They are: work interdependence, differences in goals, differences in perceptions, and increased demand for specialists.

Conclusion

It has been revealed by the study that the causes of conflict at the UDS central administration were conflicting needs, conflicting perception, conflicting goals, conflicting roles, tribalism and nepotism. From the research findings, it was noted that the types of conflict at UDS central administration were, interpersonal, intrapersonal, role, interdepartmental, intergroup and intergroup conflicts. It can therefore be concluded that conflicts do exist in that organisation. Also, the research findings have showed that, respondents in one way or the other were involve in conflict and the causes of conflict were conflicting needs, conflicting perception, conflicting goals, conflicting roles, tribalism and nepotism. The conclusion drawn from this assertion is that, the main causes of conflict are conflicting needs, perception, goals, roles, tribalism and nepotism.

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