CONFLICTS AND HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT IN AN ORGANISATIONAL SETTING

Policy Considerations, Strategies and Techniques for Performance Improvement
CONFLICTS AND HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT IN AN ORGANISATIONAL SETTING: Policy Considerations, Strategies and Techniques for Performance Improvement


by

Dr Mojeed O. A. Alabi
Expert in Good Governance, Ethics and Professionalism in the Public Sector
CENTRE AFRICAIN DE FORMATION ET DE RECHERCHE ADMINISTRATIVES POUR LE DéVELOPPEMENT (CAFRAD)
Bd. Mohammed V, Pavillon International,
P.O. Box 310, Tanger 90001,
Morocco
Tel.: +212645901676, +2348064365
Email: mojeed62@yahoo.co.uk
Focus

How do we manage conflicts for performance improvement?

- Root causes of conflicts
- Impact of conflicts
- Approaches, Techniques, Tools
  -- prevention
  -- resolution
  -- management
  -- transformation
Thesis

• HRM is a key component of the overall corporate strategy of any organization, p/p (there are others)

• Sound personnel/human resource management practices assist an organization in gaining & maintaining competitive advantage over its competitors (Schuler & MacMillan, 1984, p 241)

• Th4, efficient service delivery requires good personnel/human resource management practices

• Crisis/dispute control - a key component of HRM
Part I
The Linkage
between
Conflicts & HRM
The Basics: HRM?

- Simple definition - "the process involved in managing people in organizations" (Armstrong, 2006)
- Definition - "the strategic and coherent approach to the management of an organization's most valued assets - the people working there who individually and collectively contribute to the achievement of the objectives of the business" – Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia
- "… those decisions and actions which concern the management of employees at all levels in the business and which are related to the implementation of strategies directed towards creating and sustaining competitive advantage" (Miller, 1987, p. 352)
- "Personnel Management" – more restrictive – relates to recruitment, remuneration, etc
- HRM – the organizational function that deals with issues related to people such as compensation, hiring, performance management, organization development, safety, wellness, benefits, employee motivation, communication, administration, and training - http://humanresources.about.com/od/glossaryh/f/hr_management.htm
The Basics: Functions of HRD?

*NB: May be performed by HRD or other departments or even outsourced*
- Workforce planning
- Recruitment
- Induction/orientation of new recruits
- Skills management
- Training and development
- Personnel administration
- Compensation in wage and salary
- Time management
- Travel management (sometimes assigned to accounting rather than HRD)
- Payroll (sometimes assigned to accounting rather than HRD)
- Employee benefits administration
- Personnel cost planning
- Performance appraisal
- Labour relations
Elements of HRM (Wikipedia)

- Organisational management
- Personnel administration
- Manpower management
- Industrial management

- Conflict management runs across each of these basic elements, most visibly in relation to industrial relations
Strategic HRM

- What? - ability to recruit and retain the best human elements to gain strategic advantage over others who are competing with you for their services
  - Private sector
  - International organizations
  - Transnational corporations

- Strategic HRM should ensure "a fit" between the management of an organisation's employees and its overall strategic goal (Miller 1989)

- Strategic? HRM activities and functions must ADD VALUE to the organisation's goals
Strategic Advantage for What?

- Greater profitability/dividends
- Low employee turnover
- High product quality/service delivery
- Lower production costs/efficiency
- Customer satisfaction
How HRM Helps Gain Competitive Advantage

• Functions and activities necessary to "attract, retain, and motivate employees" (S & M, op cit p 242) -
  - human resource planning linked to the overall organisational planning
  - staffing (recruitment, selection and socialization)
  - performance appraisal
  - compensation
  - training and development
  - union-management relationships (industrial relations)

All these, particularly the last, are potential *sources of intra-organisational conflicts*; th4, need to be well managed in order to gain strategic advantage
Conflicts and HRM

- **Conflict** – Values, perspectives, opinions, interests, etc are contradictory in nature and haven’t been aligned or reconcile

- **Inevitability** of social conflicts in human organization

- **Complexity and increasing challenges** facing modern organisation
  - Values :- diversity, non-discrimination, equal opportunity in employment policies
  - Diverging aims and interests among organisation members
  - Special project teams/task forces as drivers of change and implementation of innovative/reform programmes
  - The nature of business/organisational activities breeds disputes
  - Organisational setting comprise individuals/groups with different/conflicting interests, roles, aspirations, work ethics, goals, etc

° Early waning *signals* can be recognised, & there are *solutions*
Part II

Causes & Sources of Conflicts
Conflicts occur at various levels

° *Within the individual, ie not *living *according to your values*’ – Carter McNamara, [http://www.managementhelp.org/intrpsnl/basics.htm](http://www.managementhelp.org/intrpsnl/basics.htm), accessed 17/04/2010

° *Between/among individual/groups in an organisation* (intra-organisational)

° *Between/among organisations /individuals* (inter-organisational)

° International (between/among nations)
Sources Intra-Organisational Conflicts (Intra-personal)

• Focus :- conflicts around work and organization; conflicts related to work and organisation

• Conflict with self
• Needs/wants not being met
• Values are being tested
• Perceptions are being questioned
• Assumptions are being made
• Knowledge is minimal
• Expectations are too high/low
• Presence of personality/race/gender differences
Sources Intra-Organisational Conflicts (Inter-personal)

- Conflict relation – “competitive interdependent relation in which two parties are aware that their relation is interdependent and competitive, and in which both parties desire to take competitive actions” — Makoto Takamiya, *A Pure Theory of Interorganizational Conflict*, Cambridge: MIT, 1974

- Social interaction in work place
- Workplace interdependence
- Job frustration/dissatisfaction
- Personality characteristics
- Idiosyncratic differences - culture, race, values, gender, personal preferences, age, perceptions, social status, etc - Sandra Gleason
Sources Intra-Organisational Conflicts (Inter-personal) ctd

-Suspicion/hostility towards high performers
-Conflicts in value system
-Desire for power
-Special project teams/task forces – viewed with suspicion and hostility by others, threaten the status quo, loyalty to team spirit rather than organisational goal, etc.

- McEllister, Bond and Higgins (2004)
Managerial Actions that Breed Workplace Conflicts

- Weak leadership - avoidance, ‘passing the buck’, little follow-through on decisions
- Other leadership problems, eg, inconsistent, missing, too-strong, uninformed
- Conflicting values/actions among managers and employees
- Disagreement about ‘who does what’
- Poor communication – surprises, rumours, d-making non-participatory
- Trying to be administrators; overstepping authority – boss v leader
- Lack of openness – d-making based on preconceived notions
- Inadequate resources/tools; th4, stresses
- Inadequate "homework" /preparation for meetings
- Failing to act on sensitive issues
- Not following procedures for handling complaints
- Lack of confidentiality
Supervisor-Subordinate/Co-worker Relationships

- > 60 % of work place conflicts
- Sources:
  - Goal conflicts
  - Rejection of employee input
  - Vague task assignments
  - Performance evaluations
  - Work scheduling
  - Workloads allocation
  - Ethical concerns, eg failing to be open and honest with subordinates
Part III

Patterns & Impacts of Conflicts
Manifestations of Conflicts

- Conflict indicators, [http://www.nsba.org/sbot/toolkit/Conflict.html](http://www.nsba.org/sbot/toolkit/Conflict.html)
  - Body language
  - Withholding information
  - Springing surprises at meetings
  - No discussion of progress; failure to evaluate subordinates fairly, thoroughly or at all
  - Increasing lack of respect & courtesy
  - Disagreements, regardless of issue
  - Open disagreements
  - Strong & critical statements in public/media
Positive/Constructive Conflicts

- Potential to learn from failures and conflict-ridden events (Barendrecht), & more about each other
- Helps individuals develop understanding and skills
- May create opportunities for competition, productivity, creativity and innovation - ‘form, storm, norm and perform’ (Carter McNamara)
- May enhance intra-organisational cohesion by putting itself in a situation of strain or conflict (a strong enemy is a great unifying force)
- Helps to raise, clarify, address or even resolve problems/issues
- Energises, motivates, promotes participation & facilitates communication/discussions
- Helps release emotion, anxiety, and stress
Negative/Destructive Conflicts

- Conflict is a problem when (McNamara)
  - Hampers productivity
  - Undermines morale/self-concept
  - Causes more and continued conflicts/differences
  - Causes inappropriate behaviours, eg name-calling, fighting
  - Factionalisation/polarisation

- [http://www.nsba.org/sbot/toolkit/Conflict.html](http://www.nsba.org/sbot/toolkit/Conflict.html)
Implications of Conflict for Performance


- > 65% of performance problems result from strained relationships among employees, not from deficits in individual employees’ skills or motivation

- Conflicts are resource-sapping

- Quality of work life

- Job satisfaction
Financial Costs of Conflicts

- A template THE DANA MEASURE OF FINANCIAL COST OF ORGANIZATIONAL CONFLICT, developed by the Mediation Training Institute International, http://www.mediationworks.com listed the following “cost factors” that can be measured both qualitatively and quantitatively:
- **Wasted time** – distracts from otherwise productive use of time
- **Reduced decision quality**, by withholding/distortion of info/power struggle
- **Loss of skilled employees**
- **Cost of restructuring**, involving redesigning workflow in order to reduce the amount of interaction between employees in conflict (e.g., new office, new furniture, etc)
- **Sabotage/theft/damage**, particularly of inventory/equipment
- **Lowered job satisfaction**, due to the stress of trying to get along with a ‘difficult person’
- **Lost of work time**, through absenteeism
- **Health** (including insurance) **costs**, since illness and injuries requiring medical attention are psychogenic, and conflicts may aggravate these conditions
Part IV
Prevention, Resolution, Management or …?

- Conflict can be minimized, diverted and/or resolved.
- Best option – Prevention, but intractable!
- 2nd best: *Resolution*
- Resolution – resolve to the approval of one or both parties – litigation, arbitration, etc
- But …
  - Total, and final?
  - Satisfactory?
  - Practical?
  - Zero-sum
- Management
- Transformation
Conflict Prevention

- Techniques for avoiding and/or resolving (superior-subordinate) conflict: [http://www.nsba.org/sbot/toolkit/Conflict.html](http://www.nsba.org/sbot/toolkit/Conflict.html)
- Meet conflict head on
- Set goals
- Plan for and communicate frequently
- Be honest about concerns
- Agree to disagree - understand healthy disagreement would build better decisions
- Get individual ego out of management style
- Let your team create - people will support what they help create
- Discuss differences in values openly
- Continually stress the importance of following policy
- Communicate honestly - avoid playing "gotcha" type games
- Provide more data and information than is needed
- Develop a sound management system
Transformation

* Process by which conflicts are transformed into peaceful outcomes; move conflict parties away from zero-sum positions towards positive outcomes, often with the help of external actors

* Fundamental restructuring, often applicable to societal conflicts where the very structure of parties and relationships are embedded in patterns of conflictual relationships that extend beyond the particular site of conflict.

* Characterised by long time horizons and interventions at multiple levels, aimed at changing perceptions and improving communications skills addressing the roots of conflict, including inequality and social injustice.

* Transforming the relationships that support violence
Conflict Management

• Mgt – “long-term mgt of intractable conflicts” – Wikipedia
• Ongoing process that may never have a resolution
• Which forms of conflict management will be used in any given situation can be somewhat predicted and explained by the social structure—or social geometry—of the case
Conflict Management
Approaches

• There is a menu of strategies we can choose from when in conflict situations: http://www.wright.edu/~scott.williams/LeaderLetter/conflict.htm

• **Forcing** - using formal authority or other power that you possess to satisfy your concerns without regard to the concerns of the party that you are in conflict with.

• **Accommodating** - allowing the other party to satisfy their concerns while neglecting your own.

• **Avoiding/Withdrawal** - not paying attention to the conflict and not taking any action to resolve it.

• **Compromising** - attempting to resolve a conflict by identifying a solution that is partially satisfactory to both parties, but completely satisfactory to neither.

• **Collaborating** - cooperating with the other party to understand their concerns and expressing your own concerns in an effort to find a mutually and completely satisfactory solution (win-win).

• **Confrontation** – too bad!
Techniques of Conflict Management

- No one best way; facts of each situation:
  (a) Avoidance; pretend it is not there or ignore it
    - useful when it simply is not worth the effort
    - but tends to aggravate the problem over time
  (b) Accommodation; give in, sometimes compromise yourself
    - useful only as an interim measure where you expect another more useful approach in the very soon
    - use very sparingly and infrequently
    - self dissatisfaction (internal self conflict)
    - tends to worsen the conflict over time
  (c) Competition; work to get your way, rather than clarifying and addressing the issue. Competitors love accommodators.
    - Use when you have a very strong conviction about your position
  (d) Compromise; mutual give-and-take
    - Use when the goal is to get past the issue and move on
  (e) Collaboration; focus on working together.
    - Use when the goal is to meet as many current needs
    - Use when the goal is to cultivate ownership and commitment.
Reducing Conflicts around work/organization

• 4 Core Themes by Barendrecht
• Diversity – employees with different cultural backgrounds do not communicate well, which may impede organizational performance; heterogeneity in beliefs and behaviours, which may increase or decrease the risk of conflicts; diversity creates both opportunities (to bridge social/cultural gaps) and threats (increased likelihood tensions, conflicts, disputes)
• Conflict management in more systematic, integrated and effective ways rather than using ad hoc procedures
• Proven intervention methods to reduce counter-productive, anti-social, unethical and/or discriminatory behaviours
• Flexibility in employment contracts to reflect organisation's stress on employability and employees' desire for job security
Intra-personal Conflict Mgt

• To Manage a Conflict Within Yourself - "Core Process"

1. Name the conflict, or identify the issue, including what you want that you aren't getting – write your thoughts down, talk to someone

2. Discussing the issue with someone - how important is this issue? Does the issue seem worse because you're tired, angry, at something else, etc.? What's your role in this issue?

3. Pick at least one thing you can do about the conflict - identify at least three courses of action; for each course, write at least three pros and cons; select an action (if there is no clear course of action, pick the alternative that will not hurt, or be least hurtful, to yourself and others); discuss that course of action with a friend; do something; wait at least a day before you do anything about the conflict (cooling off); take an action
Inter-personal Conflict Mgt

- **To Manage a Conflict With Another - "Core Process"**
  1. Know what you don't like about yourself; mirror what you don't like in others
     - Write down 5 traits that really bug you when see them in others
     - mirror them to yourself
  2. Manage yourself; stay calm when things get heated up
     - speak to the person as if the other person is not heated up
     - avoid use of the word "you" - this avoids blaming
     - nod your head to assure them you heard them
     - maintain eye contact with them.
  3. Move the discussion to a private area, if possible
  4. Give the other person time to vent: Don't interrupt them or judge what they are saying
  5. Verify that you're accurately hearing each other
     - you may rephrase what the other person said & get confirmation
     - to understand them more, ask open-ended questions
     - avoid "why" questions (often make people feel defensive)
6. Repeat the above step, this time for them to verify that they are hearing you
   - Use "I", not "you"
   - Talk in terms of the present as much as possible
   - Mention your feelings
7. Acknowledge areas of dis(agreement)
8. Work the issue, not the person; ask "What can we do fix the problem?" If they will likely begin to complain again, ask again
9. If possible, identify at least one action that can be done by one or both of you.
   - Ask the other person if they will support the action
   - If they will not, then ask for a "cooling off period"
10. Thank the person for working with you.
11. If the situation remains a conflict, then:
    - Consider whether to agree to disagree
    - Consider seeking a third party to mediate
    - Conclude if the other person’s behaviour conflicts with policies and procedures in the workplace and if so, present the issue to higher authority
Keys to Inter-personal Conflict Resolution at Work

- Decide whether you want to confront the person; usually better to air grievances in the open than to let them fester
- Speak to the other person calmly, politely and rationally. Focus on the situation and facts, avoiding gossip and personal attacks
- Be careful not to express hostility in your posture, facial expression or tone. Be assertive without being aggressive
- Listen to the other person carefully, and understand his/her position
- Express interest in what the other person is saying; acknowledge, not necessarily agree
- Communicate clearly what you want, offering positive suggestions and recommendations (flexibility)
- If the problem seriously threatens your work, speak to a higher authority
Consensus Building through Collaboration

- Don’t argue over individual ranking/position; logical submissions
- Avoid "win-lose" approach
- Avoid changing of minds only in order to avoid conflict and to achieve harmony.
- Avoid majority voting, averaging, bargaining, or coin flipping. If differences of opinion persist, keep asking questions.
- Keep the attitude that holding different views is both natural and healthy to a group.
- Don’t jump at consensus; scrutinise them to be sure they are real
Organisational Approach to Conflict Management

* Effective organisational conflict management strategy may decrease potential for intra-organisational conflict

* The best strategy – efficient solution without any losers (win-win); practicable? No

* Th4, second best •
  **ADR** is cost-effective than litigation •

* ADR sometimes made part of the terms and conditions of employment •
Arbitration

• In Arbitration, unlike mediation
  - authority to render a judgment or otherwise resolve the dispute
• Often resorted to when mediation fails
• More formal, binding decision
  - with/out appeal
  - less attractive for resolution of intra-organisational disputes, unless previously agreed to eg in employment contracts
Mediation

- Mediation, preferred for employment/intra-organisation disputes:
  - quick, inexpensive, just, confidential, respectful, allows disputing parties to make contributions towards the resolution of the disputes
- However, require skills – appropriate and effective use of words, impartial mediator, mediation skills, mutual trusts,
- mediator facilitates discussions between the parties that address their respective needs and concerns
Conclusion

• Prevention and early resolution is key to effective conflict mgt in an organizational setting
• No single, all-embracing technique. Understand the conflict situation, and adopt the best strategy
• To be effective, the strategy adopted has to match the situations of the conflicting parties
• Remember, don’t just hold it ........................
T A L K !!!

Source: http://www.ehow.com/how_3820_resolve-conflicts-work.html
Thanks for your attention
References

• Idag, R. J. And L. W. Kuzuhara, *Organizational behavior and management: An integrated skills approach*. Cincinnati, OH: South-Western Thomson Learning, 2002