

Administrative Conflict: Causes, Forms and Consequences

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Abstract

In the 21st century, one of the greatest challenges being faced by man has become the prevalence of conflict in all forms. Unarguably, a conflict does not enjoy a general conceptual agreement, but can easily be viewed as the variance between and among individuals. In a simple term, it can also mean disagreement in belief between groups or individuals, due to differences in opinions, views, needs and attitudes. However, the bone of contention here is administrative conflict, which has to do with differences or disagreement resulting from a perceived opposition of needs, values and interests between affected groups or individuals and a formal authority in an organization. In addition to the above, the objective of this article lies in understanding what administrative conflict is all about, its root causes, forms and consequences to an organization. Relying on qualitative research approach and secondary data generated, the study established the following findings: (a) that administrative conflict involves a conflict which emerges in an organization as a

result of differences or disagreement in beliefs, values, views, opinion and poor clarifications; (b) that causes of administrative conflict lies in a poor communication, personality variances, inequitable sharing of scarce resources, specialization, ambiguity in role description, goal variance, authority relationship and jurisdictional ambiguity; (c) that forms of administrative conflict involves process administrative conflict, task administrative conflict and relationship managerial conflict; and (d) that the consequences involves decrease in productivity, employees' departure from the organization, negative behavioral responses, psychological responses, and mental health concern, among others. The study concluded by suggesting the necessity of a future research on how administrative conflict can best be managed in order to improve and promote co-habitation and organizational efficiency.

Keywords: Conflict, administrative conflict, organization, employees, employment and interest.



Introduction

In the 21st contemporary world of globalization, the prevalence of conflict in almost all human faces such as in business, administration, among cultures, ethnics, states, non state actors and the rest of them has continued unabated. Conflict as a concept, because of its pervasive and ubiquitous nature, has gained a multitude of connotations and interpretations thereby leaving scholars, commentators and administrators in an endless debate trying to justify its meaning and significance, and how best to survive with it (Omisore & Abiodun, 2014). Generally, conflict involves a process in which a party assumes that its interests or benefits are being opposed by another. As a rule, individuals see only the observable part of conflict, such as angry words or actions of the opposition, but to Glinow and Mashanne (2008), that only involves the minor aspect of the conflict process.

In addition to the above, conflict cannot easily be separated from human existence, just as its to administrators and other business organizations. It is a natural gift of life, even though different understanding of it exists among scholars

(Omisore & Abiodun, 2014). According to Omisore and Abiodun (2014), some may see it as a negative situation that must be avoided at all cost or a phenomenon which requires management. While others may view it as an important opportunity for growth and exploit it to their utmost benefit. Closely, conflict has to do with claims and struggle over values, power, status and scarce resources in which the objective of the opponents is to injure, eliminate or neutralize the rivals (Coser, 1956). Conflict can also stand to mean an expressed tussle between independent parties who identify incompatible ends, scarce resources, goals and intrusion from parties in realizing their goals (Wilmot & Hucker, 1985). According to Wikipedia, administrative or organizational conflict involves a state of disagreement warranting from the perceived opposition of needs, interests and values between affected groups or individuals and formal authority. Conflict could occur over revenue sharing system or over how hard and long individuals should work. It could be a jurisdictional disagreement between individual departments or between managements and unions. It could also be in the form of jealousies, rivalries, role definitions, personality clashes, struggle



over favor or power. It could also manifest among individuals over competing demands and needs and to which individuals react in different manners (Omisore & Abiodun).

According to Flerwood (1987), since conflict exists side-by-side with people and becomes permanently unavoidable in all human ramifications, it is of great importance that administrators and managers develop the capacity to recognize the source of it, view its destructive and constructive potential, to understand how to manage and survive with it, as well as build conflict resolution mechanism. However, several commentators have changed their perceptions over conflict as they observe it as having the capacity for positive growth (Omisore & Abiodun). In view of this, Stevenson and Deetz (1986), shortlisted three assumptions showing that administrative conflict has the potential of being positive. In their argument, they observed conflict as being natural, good and necessary and usually based on real differences. They believe that conflict being good and necessary, if properly managed can stimulate innovative thinking, and in the absence of conflict, actions and thoughts will be executed because they are seen to be

habitual. Conflicts allow an assessment of the necessity of these actions and thoughts. Their third assumption argues that individuals are frequently nervous in confronting the actuality that legitimate variances may exist and instead fault conflict on non-existent or poor communication. According to Stevenson and Deetz (19896), it may appear easier to live with unsolved misunderstanding than to accept the fact that actual essential variances do exist and so call for recognition and management.

Importantly, administrative conflict in an organization is a day-to-today occurrence because a consensus belief concerning procedures governing the organization rarely exists between line employees and staff. They observe one another as rivals, instead as partners working together to achieve a common objective as it ought to be in every organization. In view of the narratives above, this paper relies on qualitative approach and generate data from the secondary sources to understand what administrative conflict is all about, its root causes, forms and its consequences to the progress of an organization. The paper is



organized as thus: introduction, conceptual clarification, theoretical framework, causes of conflict, its forms, consequences and conclusion.

Conceptual Clarification

The concept of conflict as earlier mentioned above suffers from a consensus meaning. According to Borisoff and Victor (1998), it is difficult to define conflict as it is complicated to have a general agreement concerning the meaning of the term. However, administratively, Wikipedia noted that administrative or organizational conflict involves a state of disagreement warranting from the perceived opposition of needs, interests and values between affected groups or individuals and formal authority. In this case, the easiest avenue to comprehend the meaning of conflict involves dividing the theories of conflict into three main groups such as, the situational, interactive and functional group theorists. The functional theorists argued that conflict serves a social function, while the situational theorists observed it as situational and the third theorists understood it as interactive. In addition, Functionalists mostly ask questions such as: ‘Why conflict? What interest does it serve?’ while Interactionalists try to

understand the followings: ‘How is there conflict? What approaches and mechanisms are applied to express it?’ and Situationalists ask thus: When do we experience conflict? Under what situations does it manifest?’

Furthermore, George Simmel, who is one of the theorists of the Functionalist school of thought and a German sociologist, in 1995, viewed conflicts as a designed act to resolve differing dualisms. It serves as a means for attaining some level of unity, even if it will be attained by extermination of one of the conflicting groups. Simmel maintained that conflict serves a social aim and reconciliation comes even with the complete annihilation of one party. Conflict socializes fellows into a group and decreases the tension among group members (Omisore & Abiodun, 2014). In addition, Simmel shortlisted three possible means to put an end to a conflict, which he explained as thus: first, conflict may end when one party attains victory over the other; second, conflict between parties can be ended through compromise; and third, via conciliation. However, not every conflict can be ended as shown (Omisore & Abiodun, 2014). Similarly, in 1967, Lewis Coser, the author of the Functions of Social



Conflict and an American sociologist understood conflict as thus: “ the clash of interests and values, the tension between what some sets feel ought to be and what is” (Coser, 1956). He went further to observe that conflict performs the task of pushing society and leading to new technology, institutions and economic systems. According to Omisore and Abiodun (2014), the vital contribution made by Coser to conflict settlement was the determination of the dysfunctional and functional roles of conflict.

According to Bercovitch (1984), who is one of the representatives of the Situationalist theorists, views conflict as a ‘situation which generates values or incorruptible goals among different parties’. He went further to argue that conflict depends on a situation. It emerges as a result of different situations, such as the influence of an individual and external factors. Closely, Folger (1993), who represents the interactive view, sees conflict as the interaction of inter-reliant individuals who perceive incompatible ends and interference from one another in attaining these ends. This school introduces two vital concepts: inter-reliant and perception. Inter-reliant has

to do with an occasion where one party’s future activity relies on another party’s activities. According Tillett (1991), conflict does not emerge when needs or values are objectively or actually incompatible with each other, or when conflict is exercised in action; it emerges when one of the parties sees it to exist. In addition, Folger also views conflict as emerging from inter-reliant individuals (Tidwell, 1998).

As the debate on conflict continues, Names, Beck and Cross (1979) observe conflict as the variances between and among individuals. They further argued that the variances are developed by the conflict, for example, goals, values, resources, ideas and motives. To Wilmot and Hocker (1985); Borisoff and Victor (1998) conflicts have to do with an expressed tussle between inter-reliant bodies who perceive incompatible scarce rewards, goal interference from the other body in attaining their goals. In the same vein, conflict can also be perceived as the disagreement in beliefs between groups or individuals, due to differences in opinions, attitudes, needs and values. In the administrative world, variance in such characteristics as personality, work experience, peer influence, situation and

environment, lead to variances in needs, values, personal attitudes and beliefs.

Deducing from the ongoing, it is clear and understandable that the concept 'conflict' suffers from lack of comprehensive and consensus meaning. Administratively and naturally, every individual has a unique way of behaving and thinks differently from others in a common situation. In view of this, it can easily be concluded that conflict, administratively or outside administration, can impact everyone to varying degree, positively or negatively (Leung, 2010).

Theoretical Framework

Conflict Theory

It is indisputable that the essence of theory in any study or research is to aid in explaining an unfolding event. In view of this, "conflict theory" is introduced in this paper in order to bring to light on how societal structures and the role of the elites have been the root motivation for various forms of administrative and non-administrative conflicts in the society. According to Knapp (1994), C. Wright Mills is known as the originator of the modern conflict theory. Mills explains that social

structures are developed through conflict between individuals with differing goals and resources. These structures in turn, influence individuals and resources, and by the unequal sharing of resources and power in the society (Knapp, 1994).

The latest articulation of the conflict theory can be seen in the work of a Canadian Sociologist Alan Sears. In her book titled "Guide to Theoretical Thinking" (2008), she observed thus:

- ❖ Societies are shaped by inequalities that breeds conflicts, instead of consensus and order. This conflict founded on inequality can only be overridden through essential transformation of the present relatives in the society.
- ❖ The disadvantaged in the society and organizations possess a structural interest that goes in variance with the status quo, which, once they are anticipated, will definitely lead to a social change in the society or organization.
- ❖ Human potential (e.g., ability for creativity) is stifled by conditions of oppression and exploitation, which are important in any society or

organization with an equivalent division of labor.

From the basis of the theory, it can be explained that administrative conflict mostly emerges from differences in individual interests, beliefs, values, goals, among other factors such as, societal structures and the role of the elites who always intend to dominate, exploit and oppress others in the organization. Other factors shall be highlighted in subsequent discussion below.

Causes of Administrative Conflict

Administrative conflict as indisputably known can emerge from various sources and causes which will be discussed below. In lieu of this, Fajana (2000) shortlisted two major sources of administrative conflict. These are the internal and external sources. According to Fajana, the internal sources are usually inherent within the background of the organization. He went further to explain that the major factor of internal source of administrative conflict has to do with “opposing interests” of organizational actors. These conflicting interests in turn give room to conflict between the parties in an organization who attempt to share what Ajibade (2004) described as “organizational

cake”. While, the external sources of administrative conflict are usually outside the walls of the organization. It may manifest when a third party mediation to organizational dispute becomes biased or one sided. One good example emerges when a government or an authority as a third party and a regulatory body attempts to enact or formulate a policy that favors one group at the expense of the other (Fajana, 2000).

Therefore, considering the various causes of administrative or organizational conflict, the following factors such as, poor communication, personality differences, inequitable sharing of resources, sexual harassment, specialization, common resources, goal variances, interdependence, authority relationship, duties and expectations and jurisdictional ambiguities are discussed;

✚ Poor Communication

According to Isa (2015), poor communication in an organization is an avenue for administrative conflict to emerge. This can occur as a difference in style of communication or failure to communicate appropriately. For example, in an organization, a manager can reassign an

employee's role to another worker, but failed to inform the other employee of the changes. This type of situation can make the former employee feel offended, and has the capacity to transform into administrative conflict between the two employees and the organizational manager. Communication failure of any organization may cause workers to develop incorrect assumptions and creates room for gossip that may lead to conflict. Communication is the backbone and success of administration in any organization (Isa, 2015).

Personality Variance

Organizational workers or employees usually come from various backgrounds and accompanied with different experiences that shape their personalities. To Isa (2015) difference in employees' personalities, is another cause for administrative conflict. When workers fail to accept or accommodate their personality differences, administrative conflict will surely arise. For example, a worker may have a straightforward personality that makes him/her to always say whatever is in his/her mind, even when the timing is not appropriate. A worker with this type of personality can easily offend a colleague or

another worker who does not have this type of personality and cannot tolerate him/her (Isa, 2015). Closely, Media and Brookins (2008) noted that administrative or employee conflict is a common phenomenon which usually emanates from the variances in organizational or employees' values and personalities.

Inequitable Sharing of Limited Resources

In several work situations, we often share resources. In view of this, Omisore and Abiodun (2014); Isa (2015), observed that the more resources to share in organization are scarce, the greater the room for a conflict emergence. Scarcity of resources breeds conflicts because each individual that needs the same resources essentially undermines the other. Limited resources may involve money, information, people or supplies (Omisore & Abiodun, 2014). For instance, a software company based in Washington known as Redmond may dominate many markets, but its employees still conflict over limited resources (Glinow & Mcshare, 2008). Also, considering a firm that installs a latest computer for research and administrative purpose, at first, there is much space and computer time for both

uses. However, as employees make more use of the computers, access may become difficult, and conflict may emerge at that point (Omisore & Abiodun, 2014).

Specialization

Administrators or workers often inclined to become specialists in a specific job or acquire a general knowledge of several tasks. If most workers in an organization become specialists, it can generate to conflict as they may have little understanding of each other's duty. For example, an administrator at a camera repair shop can say that a camera could be fixed in an hour, even when the repair may take a week. Since the administrator lacks a comprehensive knowledge about the technician's work, he/she is not supposed to offer an unrealistic date when the camera will be fixed. This type of situation has the capacity to generate conflict between the technician and the administrator (Omisore & Abiodun, 2014)

Ambiguity in Role Description

In every organization, every worker has one or multiple roles to perform. According to Cameron and Whettam (2012), these roles involve elements such as job description, job

title, and the agreement between an organization and an employee. Under this heading, manager-subordinate conflict may emerge when the subordinate role or duty is not clearly defined and every party has a dissimilar knowledge of that role.

Goal Variances

In most cases, the likelihood of administrative conflict increases significantly, especially when departments in an organization have incompatible or different goals. For example, the goal or objective of a computer seller is to sell several computers as quick as possible. However, if the manufacturing department becomes unable to meet up with the salesman's demand, in this situation, conflict may emerge as both have a different goals and target. Closely, task interdependence is another cause of administrative conflict. When a department has to rely on another department to complete its task, if anything goes wrong under this situation, it is usually easy to apportion blame which may give rise to conflict.

Authority Relationships

In many organizations, it is observed that an underlying strain between employees and their managers usually exist as most individuals do not always like to be told what to do. In many firms, managers enjoy several privileges ranging from free individual long-distance calls, flexible hours and long breaks. It is perceived that very rigid managers usually conflict with their workers. Sometimes individuals engage in conflict to upsurge their status and power in an organization (Omisore and Abiodun, 2014).

Jurisdictional Ambiguities

It is noted that when the lines of a task or responsibility in a firm are not certain, then room for jurisdictional ambiguities emerges. Workers usually have the predisposition to pass an unwanted task to another worker when tasks are not well defined. Ambiguous jurisdictions, goals or performance criteria have the capacity to lead to conflict in an organization. Under such vagueness, the formal and informal laws that regulate interaction break down. Ambiguous jurisdictions are usually revealed when latest programs are introduced.

Forms of Administrative Conflict

Several commentators have attempted to classify administrative conflicts into numerous forms. The forms that are conspicuously identified are as follows: (a) Process administrative conflict, (b) Task administrative conflict and (c) Relationship administrative conflict. These forms are discussed below;

Process Administrative Conflict

Process administrative conflict is a form of administrative conflict which has to do with a disagreement or dispute over how an organizational task should be executed, individuals' obligations and delegation (Mannix & Jehn, 2001). For instance, it manifests when administrative members disagree over whose duty it is to execute a particular task in their organization. According to Jehn (1999), process conflict is associated with poor team performance, decreased productivity and low morale. This form of conflict retards organizational growth if not handled with clarity.

Task Administrative Conflict

Task administrative conflict involves a form of administrative conflict in an organization which has to do with a dispute over the content of a work goal and task, such as



sharing of resources, interpretation of facts and work procedures (Jehn, 1995). In addition, task-administrative conflicts include variances in ideas, opinions and viewpoints which may coincide with personal excitement and animated discussions. According to Jehn et al (1999), task-administrative conflict is associated with many beneficial effects which include improving the practice of debate within a group. Similarly, West and Anderson (1996) and Amason (1996) also observed that a debate within a team leads to innovation and quality ideas as well as better service delivery (Wong, Tjosvold & Dann, 1992). However, Jehn et al (1997); Kabanoff (1991); Jehn (1997) observed that task-administrative conflict can equally be associated with many harmful effects, these include poor team cooperation, job dissatisfaction and increased job anxiety.

❖ **Relationship Administrative Conflict**

According to Jehn (1995), relationship administrative conflict emerges when there exists an interpersonal inconsistency between group members in an organization. This form of conflict has to do with personality clashes, annoyance, tension and

animosity between group members. In the same vein, Conlon and Murnighan (1991) believe that this form of administrative conflict produces negative personal emotions, such as mistrust, resentment, anxiety, tension, frustration and the fear of being excluded from other team groups. In addition, other forms of administrative conflict include inter organizational conflict, interpersonal conflict, interdepartmental/inter group conflict and intra group/interpersonal conflict and many others.

Consequences of Administrative Conflict

According to Omisore and Abiodun (2014), conflict can occur among individuals, such as between a superior and his subordinate or among heads of department in an organization. Members can be drawn into an administrative conflict with one another on the basis of job performance, significance to a particular set and, in overall, union-management conflicts. Conflict can also emerge within an individual, such as in circumstances of dilemma of making a choice, clearly branded as being hooked on the antlers of dilemma or phrases such as, “amid the deep blue sea and the devil. For instance, an organizational manager can be

confused about how to resolve a conflict (with a union or employees) that has the capacity to result in production short-down or loss of productivity. The overall perception is that administrative conflicts tend to impact negative consequences to both the organization and the individual. In view of this, the following consequences, both at the organizational and the individual level are discussed below;

Consequences at Organizational Level

According to Brookins and Media (2002), as organizations and firms endeavor to attain their organizational set objectives, they are frequently met with diverse challenges they must deal with as a team. Challenges create an avenue for conflicts between organizations, departments, members, communities and other bodies involved in the mission of the organization (Isa, 2015). Under the organizational level, administrative conflict breeds the following consequences:

+ Decrease in Productivity or Output

Decrease in an organizational productivity has been identified as one of the consequences of organizational

administrative conflict. According to Isa (2015) when an organization or firm devotes much of its time handling administrative conflict, employees interest is diverted from concentrating on the major organizational goals to be accomplished. Administrative conflict causes employees to give less focus to the project before them and spend much time venting about frustrations or gossiping. In situations of this nature, organizations can lose access to vital resources, money and donors (Isa, 2015).

+ Employees Leave Organization

Administrative conflict is usually disastrous to an organization and its employees. When members in an organization are increasingly discouraged and frustrated with the way administrative conflicts upsurge in their company or organization, they may decide to withdraw their membership (Isa, 2015). This type of situation is usually disastrous, particularly when members form part of the heads of committees or executive board in the organization. Isa further observed that when members start to withdraw their membership or leave, the organization must employ new members and assign acting board members (Isa, 2015). In extreme situations, where many members leave or



withdraw their membership or the executive board steps aside, the organization risks dissolution.

Consequences at Individual Level

As earlier observed, the consequences of administrative conflict do not only impact negatively on the organization, but also on the individual workers in the organization. The following consequences of administrative conflict to employee are expressed below;

✚ Behavioral Responses

Administrative conflict in an organization has indisputably observed to impact negatively to employees behavior, especially when it involves employees and not handled or resolved amicably. According to Omisore and Abiodun (2014) when employee conflict is not properly handled by managers, it can lead an employee to develop the habit of alcoholism, excessive smoking, overeating or under eating, decrease in interaction, work sabotage or aggression to others and resisting influence attempts.

✚ Psychological Responses

Administrative conflict also leads to psychological responses, especially when it

is not properly managed. In lieu of this, Omisore and Abiodun (2014) noted that when administrative conflicts fails to cease or resolved by the heads of the organization, it could have the following negative consequences on the individual involved. These consequences include an individual paying less attention to other issues, job dissatisfaction, less interest in work, work anxiety, frustration, alienation from others or estrangement and many more.

✚ Mental Health Concerns

In a relation to Psychological responses as discussed above, Isa (2015) noted that administrative conflict in an organization has the capacity to make an employee to become frustrated. He further argued that when there is no remedy in sight or an employee feels that his/her opinions no longer count by other members in the organization, he/she becomes stressed which invariably affects his/her personal and professional life. This type of employee may experience difficulty in sleeping, headache, overeating or loss of appetite and becomes unapproachable. In some occasions, an employee may even escape meetings to avoid ill feelings and stress related symptoms.

Conclusion

From the various insights above, it is very obvious that administrative conflict is inevitable in modern organizations. Administrative conflict as observed is a conflict which takes place in an organization and could be between managers, employees or managers and their employees. The objective of the paper was to comprehend what is administrative conflict, its root causes, forms and its consequences to both organization and individual. Using qualitative and historical analytical approach, the paper fulfilling its objective found out the followings such as, poor communication, personality variances, inequitable sharing of resources, specialization, ambiguity in role description, goal variances, authority relationship and judicial ambiguities as the major causes of administrative conflict. It also found process administrative conflict, task-administrative conflict, and relational administrative conflict as the key forms of administrative conflict. While, decrease in organizational productivity and employee leaving the organization as its consequences at the organizational level, and factors such as behavioral response, psychological response

and mental health concern as its consequences at the individual level.

In view of the above, the study, therefore, recommends that in dealing with administrative conflict in any organization, organizations are advised to consider the following recommendations below:

- Organizations should from time to time organize workshops to enlighten their staff on how to manage administrative conflict and their resolution mechanisms.
- Organizations should also pay maximum attention to the welfare of their employees to minimize conflict and promote productivity.
- Organizations should equally develop a standard channel of communication, information dissemination, as well as delegation of authority.
- Organizations should discourage autocratic way of management to encourage participation.
- Finally, organizations should build a room for dialogue and interaction in conflict situations for better resolution.

As Darling and Fogliasso (1999) observed that it is usually impossible to totally eliminate conflict in an organization. In view of this, the paper concludes by believing that if the following recommendations shortlisted above are considered and put into use by administrators and managers in an organization, they may not totally eliminate all administrative conflicts, but they will go a long way in ensuring productivity, harmony and stability in any organization. Further study is also needed to fully understand how administrative conflict can best be managed by administrators.

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