STRATEGIES FOR MANAGING WORKPLACE CONFLICTS IN AN ERA OF GLOBAL ECONOMIC RECESSION IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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 Abstract

Peace is a sine qua non for progress and development in every social system. The absence of peace in the workplace can hinder productive activities and progress. This study stressed that conflict is an inevitable element in every workplace and that the constructive resolution of conflicts in the workplace is needed for organizational efficiency and productivity. Based on the above, this study examined the compelling need for the adoption of a variety of conflict management strategies for prevention and management of conflicts in the workplace, in an era of global economic recession, which is currently replete with conflicts. Industrial harmony is therefore, a necessary precondition for realizing the strategic and corporate objectives of every organization. It is the argument of this study that conflict in the workplace can assume a 'functional' or 'dysfunctional' dimensions, depending on how effective or defective are the management strategies adopted to manage the conflict. Hence, there is the need for a constructive management and transformation of conflicts in the work place. To this end, the study presented some conflict management strategies and a conflict management model for the prevention and management of workplace conflicts. In the end, the study made some recommendations on how to peacefully manage conflict in the contemporary workplace.

Key Concepts: Industrial Conflict, Global Economic Recession, Strategies, Conflict Management.

Introduction

To a great extent, peace and conflict are two critical elements that can promote or hinder productive activities and progress in any organization. On one hand, peace is a major ingredient for the creation

of a conducive environment in the workplace, wherein efficient productive activities can take place. On the other hand, the occurrence of conflict in the workplace can undermine productive activities. Specifically, the nature of interactions that exist in the workplace between management and workers' or with the workers' union is very crucial and fundamental in determining the level of productive activities in the organization. Generally speaking, conflict manifests in the performance of tasks in the workplace and the enforcement of rules that govern every workplace. According to Adler (2002), he noted that:

Like it or not, conflict is part of every job. Even the most competent, intelligent, ethical people will disagree from time to time…sometimes conflict involves work related issues. Scheduling, funds, work assignments, and so on. Other times it focuses on personal issues, sexual harassment, and the amount of socializing appropriate during working hours or whether a shared assistant in doing his or her work efficiently the dispute may be loud and argumentative, calm and rational or so indirect that it is never mentioned outright.

Conflict is an inevitable feature in every organization and the occurrence of conflict in an organization signals a problem that requires urgent attention. In this sense, the outbreak of conflict suggests the existence of a situation that can threaten harmony and productive activities in the workplace. In order to avert the destructive consequences of conflict in the workplace, it is the task of any organization that desires to experience sustainable level of growth and productivity to develop efficient strategies for managing conflict. In this regard, Tjosvold (1998) has argued that "the effectiveness of individual employees, teams and entire organizations depends on how they manage interpersonal conflict at work." As valid as Tjosvold's argument is, caution must be taken as to how conflicts in the workplace must be resolved so that they do not get out of hand or escalate to violence. Hence, Cetin and Hacifazlioghu (2004) have warned that "the way a conflict is handled would affect the nature of the conflict, that is, whether it becomes beneficial or destructive. This point out the fact that there are benefits in any efficiently resolved conflict. Evidently, a peaceful and conducive working environment is the key to stimulating team spirit and increased productivity in every organization."

It is apparent from Cetin and Hacifazlioghu's arguments that the handling of conflicts in the organization can either result to destructive consequences or beneficial outcomes. In this sense, a poorly resolved conflict can undermine harmony and productive activities in the workplace. While an efficiently handled conflict is a powerful social force for bringing about harmony, change, stability, creativity and increased productivity in organization. The challenge therefore is that managers, labour unions and employees in general should try to transform conflict situations into beneficial outcomes through the adoption of peaceful and non violent conflict management strategies. At this juncture, it is good to reiterate again that conflict is an inevitable phenomenon in any social system, hence Armstrong (1999) opined that "conflict is inevitable in any social systems because they function by means of adjustments and compromises among competitive elements in their structure and membership." He added that "conflict is not to be deplored. It is an inevitable result of progress and change; it can and should be used constructively."

To this end, this paper intends to advance the use of various conflict management strategies for resolving industrial conflicts in an era of global economic recession where it is certain that there will be proliferation of conflicts between employers (management) and labour unions or employees in most organizations in the world over. This is prompted by the fact that most managements are now trying to cut down costs by downsizing workers, reducing workers salary and the general welfare conditions of workers. The pursuance of such policies by management is being resisted by workers or their unions that expect to their employers raise their salaries and improve their general welfare so that they can cope with the harsh economic effects of the recession.

Theoretical Framework
The "Human Needs theory" postulated by John Burton (1979), is adopted as the theoretical framework of this study. In this theory, Burton identified a link between frustration which forces human being into acts of aggression and the need on the part of such individuals to satisfy their basic needs. He argued further that individuals cannot be taught to accept practices that destroy their identity and other goals that are attached to their needs and because of this, they are forced to react against the factors, groups and institutions that they see as being

responsible for threatening such needs. According to Burton, the human needs theory was introduced to debunk the other theories of conflict which lay claim to the innately aggressive nature of human beings.

To this end, Burton's theory of "Human Needs" presents a plausible explanation of the causes of conflicts in the work place. It clearly shows that the denial of the basic needs of employees by the management is the fundamental cause of conflict in the workplace. Hence, "the struggle to satisfy basic needs is a key motivational factor behind human behaviour and social interactions" (Jeong, 2000:71) and Galtung (2000) also argue that where there exists a "basic conflict, with basic needs among the goals, aggression is more likely." It can be deduced from this theory, therefore, that conflict in organizations are fundamentally caused by the struggle to satisfy the basic needs of management on one hand and the needs of the employees on the other hand. The primary need of management is maximization of profit while that of employees or their unions is to enjoy better salaries and improved working conditions. Whenever the needs of the management and employees or their unions run contrary or are incompatible, conflict becomes inevitable.

Conceptual Clarification

Conflict
As a concept, conflict has attracted so many definitions. For example, Otite believes that conflicts arise from the pursuit of divergent interests, goals and aspirations by individuals or groups in defined social and physical environments (Otite, 1999). This definition shows that in every social setting whether at the level of family, groups, organization, or state, the struggle for interests, goals and aspirations abounds. Also, Donohue and Kolt (1992:3) posit that "conflict involves situations in which differences are expressed by interdependent peoples in the process of achieving their needs and goals." It also arises when differences between two (or more) people necessitate change in at least one person in order for their engagement to continue and develop…The differences cannot co-exist without some adjustment (Jordan, 1990:4). Conflict is also conceived as "a struggle over values and claims to scare status, power and resources in which the aims of

the opponents are to neutralize, injure or eliminate their rivals" (Coser, 1956:8).

Conflict is "said to occur when one party perceives the action of another party as blocking the opportunity for the attainment of a goal; for conflict to occur, two prerequisites must be satisfied, namely: perceived goal incompatibility and perceived opportunity for interference or blocking" (Schmidt & Kochan, 1972). Conflict ensues as a result of the manifestation of behaviours perceived to frustrate or obstruct the achievement of the goal(s) of person(s) or group. By and large, conflict can be defined as any disagreement that occurs between individuals or groups as a result of incompatible or differing interests, goals or opinions.

Industrial/Workplace Conflict

Akanji (2005) defines industrial conflict as "the social/human problems arising from disagreements or differences between two or more parties over an issue in an industrial (organizational) system." The European foundation for the improvement of living and working conditions also defines industrial/organizational conflict as the clash of interests, can also result in disputes of varying intensity, between individuals, groups and organizations in industrial relations system. Also, Gordon Marshall (1998) refers to industrial conflict as all expressions of dissatisfaction within the employment relationship, especially those pertaining to the employment contract, and the effort bargain. In this sense, conflict in the workplace occurs as a result of asymmetric power relations between employees and management. By and large, industrial conflict refers to the disagreement which occurs as a result of incompatible interests or goals between management and labour union in the work place.

Conflict Management

The term "conflict management" is the art of designing appropriate institutions to guide the inevitable conflict into appropriate channels (Maill, 2007:3). Also, Otite and Albert (1999:11) describes conflict management as "more elaborate and wider in conception and application, when necessitated; it involves conflict resolution and transformation. It is more of a long-term arrangement involving institutionalized provisions and regulative procedures for dealing with

conflicts wherever they occur." In the same vein, Zartman (1988:8) conceives conflict management as the elimination, neutralization of conflict from erupting into crises or to cool a crisis in eruption. On the part of Arno (1984:3), he sees conflict management as "the social process of allowing conflict to run its course and perform its beneficial functions in society without becoming destructive to basic structural relationships." Hamad (2005:12) broadly defines conflict management as "all of what is done by the actors or parties to the conflict, whether that is confrontation, settlement, escalation, or blocking solutions."

Primarily, the goal of conflict management is to settle, contain and regulate conflicts so that they do not cross the threshold of violence or become dysfunctional to cause human suffering or destruction to property and public order. To this end, conflict management can be defined as all the efforts, skills, methods and resources employed in the constructive resolution of conflict by parties to conflict and other concerned stakeholders.

Nature of Conflict Interactions in Workplace

Conflict interactions exist wherever there is interpersonal relationship between people, including the workplace. According to Folger et. al (1997), conflict interactions are characterized by moves and counter-moves which are themselves determined by the power wielding by the parties involved. Therefore, he opined that conflict interactions include the following:

- Patterns of behaviours that tend to be sustained;
- Steps taken in the course of such interaction are products of the larger environment in which they take place;
- There is a general understanding of the direction of such interaction; and
- Such interaction impacts on relations between the parties involved.

In line with the above, Coser (1968) describes conflict as a "vivid form of interaction" and "in the course of interaction, conflict emerges as a counteracting force to be reckoned with, and paves the way for better interactional situations" (Rangarajan, 2008). But, Dahrendorf (1959) believes that "the chances of incidence of conflict are less in a system where conflict interaction gets regularized through legal norms and

other mediation agencies" or through a well articulated collective bargaining system. However, the general outcome of conflict interactions in organizations can either be functional or dysfunctional. A conflict is said to be functional if it brings about positive changes, enhances individual and group performances, improves the quality of decisions, stimulates creativity and innovation, improves communication and creates a conducive atmosphere for work. On the other hand, a conflict is dysfunctional or destructive if it results to breakdown of communication, disrupts operations or productive activities in the workplace and reduces individual and group performances. A functional conflict is desirable because of its numerous benefits to the progress and realization of the corporate objectives of organization.

Types of Industrial/Workplace Conflicts
Different types of conflicts exist in the workplace. For example, Fox (1971) identified four basic types of industrial or workplace conflicts, which include conflict between:

1. individuals – usually at management level;
2. an individual worker and management;
3. workers union and management;
4. workers within a union.

Also, Gordon Marshall (1998) categorized industrial or workplace conflicts into two broad classes, which are: informal and formal. According to Marshall, he describes informal industrial conflict as not based on any systematic organization, but results directly from a sense of grievance, and supposedly is wholly expressive in nature. He opines that informal conflict is characterized by unconscious protest, including absenteeism, frequent job-changing, negligence, and even accidents at work.

On the other hand, he refers to formal industrial conflict as reserved for organized expressions of conflict articulated through a trade-union or other worker representatives. Its supposed purpose is strategic or instrumental rather than (or as well as) expressed and may often involve workers who, by themselves, have no feelings or personal involvement regarding the issues at stake in the dispute. Its characteristic form is the organized strike; that is, a withdrawal of

labour such as to constitute a temporary breach of contract, using the collective strength of the workforce to avoid sanctions and achieve adjustments to pay or conditions of work (Gordon Marshall, 1998).

In general terms, conflicts that occur in the workplace can be classified as follows:

- Worker and worker conflict (conflict between two or more workers)
- Management and worker conflict
- Workers' union and management
- Conflict within management
- Conflict within workers' union
- Conflict between superior and subordinate
- Customer and worker conflict.

Causes of Industrial/Workplace Conflicts

Every organization is prone to experience one form of conflict or the other as long as there is collectivity of different people and interests. However, the causes of conflict in the workplace are more specific to the context of the work environment. However, scholars like Burton, (1979); Jeong, (2000) and Galtung, (2000) have all pointed out that when human needs are denied or when individuals find it difficult to satisfy their basic needs that they result to aggressive behaviour such as conflict. On the causes of industrial conflict, Akanji (2005) noted the causes of conflict in the workplace to "range from structural features of the workplace, frustration and personality characteristics to the differences in culture, race, values, gender, personal preferences and social status." Conflicts in the work situations are a consequence of the breakdown in the standard mechanism of decision- making (March, et al. (1965). At the same time, Gimlech and Carol (1991) also identified ten sources of conflicts in the workplace which are based on the structure of a complex organization:

i. The level of bureaucratic hierarchy;
ii. The rules and regulations influencing job structure, and role clarity;
iii. The degree of departmental specialization;
iv. The demographic and psychological similarities and differences among the staff and the degree of staff stability;
v. The degree of use of close supervisor;

vi. The degree of employees participation in decision making;
vii. The types of power used by the manager to achieve goals (e.g. reward and recognition, punishment, personal persuasion);
viii. The type of reward and recognition in place and their implementation;
ix. The degree of staff interdependences; and
x Conflict in the roles and responsibilities of manager.

Generally speaking, the causes of conflicts in the workplace include the following:

- Unbalanced power relations between management and labour union or employees;
- Refusal of management to involve labour union or employees in the process of decision making especially on issues that concern them;
- Non payment of staff salaries;
- Promotion issues;
- Hours of work;
- Conditions of service;
- Leadership styles;
- Victimization;
- Gender issues;
- Office politics; and
- Ideological differences.

Types of Industrial Actions
There are many types of Industrial actions which are usually employed by workers or workers' union during conflict situation in the workplace. They include the following:
   (i) Lockouts
   (ii) Strikes (iii) Pickets (iv) Work-to-rule
   (v) Absenteeism
  (vi) Sabotage (vii) Staff Turnover (viii) Restriction of output.

The application of any of these actions can disrupt harmony and productive activities in the workplace.

Costs of Conflict in the Workplace

By cost of conflict, I mean the losses or sufferings that usually accompany conflict outbreaks. Some of the visible costs of conflict in the workplace are stress, disruption of productive activities in the workplace and decrease in productivity. Upsets relationships; creates factions; causes absenteeism; prompts resignation; makes recruitment difficult; prevents creative thinking; and wastes energy time and money. Also, Miller (2003) notes that the symptoms of workplace with a high degree of conflict could be heightened interpersonal conflict, declining performance, absenteeism, turf wars, spurious grievances, and excessive turnover. The costs of conflicts in the workplace can be classified as follows:

- **Economic cost**: These include loss of revenue, reduction in profit, unpaid salaries, cost of hiring lawyers or Attorneys, money for paying compensations and additional cost of sustaining operations during strikes.
- **Social cost**: Breakdown of communication and social interactions across the organizational strata, absenteeism, labour turnover, loss of customers, and bad corporate image.
- **Material cost**: Acts of sabotage such as destruction or vandalization of equipment and property.
- **Humanitarian cost**: Human sufferings, injuries and wounds sustained during fighting and confrontations in the workplace.
- **Operational cost**: Decrease in productivity, disruption of operations and productive activities.

Following from the above, it is obvious that the cost or effects of conflicts in the workplace are numerous and they are capable of undermining harmony in the workplace; and by extension, they hinder optimal productivity and progress in organization.

Strategies for Managing Workplace or Industrial Conflicts

It is the argument of this paper that the current global economic recession has the potential of igniting increased agitations and conflicts in the workplace. In order to combat the problems created by the global economic recession on organizational investments, employers of labour worldwide are beginning to take drastic policy measures to combat the deleterious effects of the present global economic recession on their investments. Such measures include: downsizing of

workforce, reduction in salaries and general workers welfare, etc. The pursuance of these policy objectives by employers of labour has always been met with stiff resistance from labour unions and employees, who have been demanding for the security of their jobs, better wages and general improvement in their welfare. These demands are to enable them cope with the challenges posed by the current economic recession ravaging the economies of countries of the world. As a result, employers and labour unions have been at logger head consequently there has been proliferation of conflicts in most organizations.

In order to avert the consequences associated with the proliferation of conflicts in the workplace, there is the need for both public and private organizations to embark on capacity building training on conflict management for management, labour unions and employees generally in the organizations. This is with a view to equipping industrial actors with the requisite conflict management skills to peacefully resolve conflicts in the workplace. In line with this, Dahrendorf (1959) posited that chances of incidence of conflict are less in a system where conflict interaction gets regularized through legal norms and other mediation agencies. This is because there are great benefits in resolving conflict skilfully and appropriately. A well resolved conflict will no doubt stimulate high team spirit and increased productivity. However, the task of managing conflicts in the workplace primarily rests on managers. As a matter of fact, Waitchalla, Suppiah and Raduan Che Rose (2006) in their study found out that managers spent in excess of 20% of their time dealing with conflict. The reason for this, according to Tschannen-Moran and Perez (2003: 783), is that effective conflict management is a pre-requisite to management because it "breathes life and energy into relationships and production." In the same vein, conflict management promotes cooperation, mutuality, consensus-building, social-bridge reconstruction and re-enactment of order in the workplace.

There are several peaceful methods or strategies which can be employed to manage conflicts in the workplace. Wilmot and Hocker (1998) identified these methods to include: facilitation, mediation, counselling and therapy, organizational development, conciliation, quasi-political federalism, informal tribunals, arbitration of several types, and criminal and civil justice system. Apart from the two methods, there are other styles of handling conflicts, which are:

domination/competing, accommodating, avoidance, collaborating, compromising, fighting, confrontation and joint problem solving. However, the likely outcome of the adoption of any of the two methods, according to Faleti (2005) "are threefold: win-win outcome, zero-sum or win-lose outcome, and lose-lose outcome. The most desirable of these is a win-win outcome, in which the interests of the parties to conflict are taken into consideration in the resolution process."

Benefits of Conflict Management in the Workplace
The benefits of conflict management in the workplace are numerous. These include:

- It eliminates conflict in the work place.
- It exposes and eliminates root causes of conflicts in the workplace.
- It fosters friendly relations in organization.
- It ensures industrial harmony and peaceful coexistence in the workplace.
- It reconciles conflicting parties.
- It eliminates fears, prejudice, hatred and victimization in the workplace.
- It boasts the confidence of employees and the employers in the workplace.
- It enhances workers efficiency and productivity.
- It promotes stability in the workplace.
- It enhances the quality of decision making and policy implementation.
- It reduces likelihood of strikes.
- It reduces tension in the work place.
- It improves organizational communication.
- It creates a democratic environment in the workplace.
- It serves as a healing process to conflict situations in the organization.

There are various conflict management strategies available for the resolution of workplace conflicts. These strategies are as follow:

Domination/Competing

This is a style of dealing with conflict where one has high concern for self and low concern for other. In a conflict situation, one party tries to dominate the other party by suppression and issuing of threat. The primary motivation in this strategy is that one party which is normally the stronger party desires to win and therefore make the other party to lose. This is not a good way of settling conflict, as it often results in win-lose.

Avoidance/Denial

Conflict avoidance may occur when one party in a potential conflict ignores or avoids the conflicting issues or the other party as if they do not exist at all, even though the individual may not be happy. According to Wilmot and Hocker (1998: 114), this strategy is such that one of the parties adopts an attitude that tends to deny the existence of conflict, being non-committal, and evasive of issues pertaining to tackling the basis of the conflict. This is just like trying to postpone the "evil days". It is also not a good strategy for managing conflict, as it usually results to zero-sum or lose-lose outcome.

Compromising

This is a situation where a party in a conflict is partially cooperative and at the same time partially assertive. Compromising involves finding an expedient mutually acceptable solution, which partly satisfies both parties. According to Ochinya (2006), compromise becomes necessary in situations where the positions of the parties are so incompatible that the two cannot be reconciled without one of them losing something in the process.

Collaboration

In this situation, the parties to conflict put up dispositions of assertiveness and cooperativeness. This enables them to mutually achieve a common goal. This situation is known as joint problem solving. In most cases, this strategy results to win-win outcome.

Accommodation

This is a conflict handling style where one has high concern for others and low concern for self. This strategy encourages self-sacrifice,

cooperation, mutuality and concern for others. This is also another very good way of handling conflict.

Fighting and Confrontation

This occurs when parties in a conflict situation physically or emotionally attack each other. They could do this by threatening each other, insulting each other and even engaging each other in violent acts such as hitting each other. Confrontation is usually provoked by acts of victimization, bullying, threats and punishments. The obvious out come of this method may be two fold; win-lose or lose-lose.

Joint Problem Solving (JPS)

This is an approach that involves parties constructively listening to each other with the intention to understand the underlying elements in the conflict and to deal with the issues (Ochinya, 2006). In this approach, parties to a conflict agree to come together to solve their problem whether by themselves or to submit their consent to a third party with a view to assisting them to resolve their conflict. The most likely outcome of this is win-win. Example of joint problem solving (JPS) is collective bargaining, negotiation, mediation, conciliation, litigation, arbitration etc.

Forms of Third-Party Interventions

Third party intervention arises when a person, an institution or a body with legitimacy, acting on behalf of the entire society, intervenes and imposes mandatory terms of resolving the conflict on the feuding parties (Wilmot and Hocker, 1998: 7). Third party intervention is primarily aimed at "controlled communication" (Burton, 1965) between parties to conflict. The various forms of third party interventions are negotiation, mediation, arbitration, conciliation, and adjudication. These methods are discussed below:

Negotiation

Negotiation is defined as "a structured process of dialogue between conflicting parties about issues in which their opinions differ" (Fisher, 2000: 115). Also, the University for Peace defines "communication, usually governed by pre-established procedures, between representatives of parties involved in a conflict or dispute" (Miller,

2003: 25). Negotiation is also a process in which two or more parties in conflict realize that they have a common problem and they so agree to come together to find a mutually acceptable solution to their conflict. It is also a process of bargaining in order to reach a decision that is mutually acceptable to parties in conflict. Hence, Jeong (2000: 168) opined that the goal of negotiation is "to reach agreement through joint decision making between parties." The act or process of negotiation involves the use of communication between parties in conflict agreeing to come together to discuss their problem, and this affords 'enemies' the opportunity to converse together in order to improve their broken communication. Collective bargaining is a very good example of negotiation, which is widely used in settling trade dispute.

Mediation
Mediation is a conflict management strategy in which a neutral third party assists parties in conflict to resolve their conflict. Miller (2002: 23) sees mediation as "the voluntary, informal, non-binding process undertaken by an external party that fosters the settlement of differences or demands between directly invested parties." In a mediation process, the parties in conflict submit their consent to the mediator who assists them to find a mutually acceptable solution to their conflict. Mediation is a very potent strategy that can be used to settle conflict in the workplace.

Arbitration
This is another type of conflict management strategy which is a step higher than mediation and negotiation. Arbitration is the use and assistance of a neutral third party in the settling of a dispute between conflict parties. The arbitrator hears the evidence from both parties, and thereafter renders a decision, which is often called "award" and this is normally expected to be binding on the parties in conflict. Arbitration is voluntary at the initial stage in that the disputants have control over the process but once the arbitrator decides on the issue, it binding by law, just as a court ruling.

Conciliation

Conciliation is almost synonymous with mediation, but there are some few differences between the two concepts. These are:

  (1)   A conciliator may give an opinion or suggest agreement for the parties

  (2)   It is normally backed up by law, and

  (3)   Most of the times the conciliator is a government official who is usually the case in the law backing the process. Hence, the University for Peace sees conciliation as:

> *The voluntary referral of a conflict to a neutral external party (in the form of an unofficial commission) which either suggests a non-binding settlement or conducts explorations to facilitate more structures or techniques of conflict resolution. The latte can include confidential discussions with the disputants or assistance during a pre-negotiation phase (Miller, 2003: 6-7).*

Conciliation, therefore aims at reducing tensions between parties in a conflict.

The conflict management strategies above provide a wide range of variety of choices for managers, labour unions and employees for them to constructively manage conflicts in the workplace so as to ensure harmony. Managers need to identify, pre-empt and prevent the outbreaks of conflicts by "nipping conflicts in the bud" However, it should be noted that "conflict is usually viewed in a negative sense as the source of anxiety, fear and destruction but is, in fact, a source of creativity, change, and development" (Albert, 2001). Therefore, managers are expected to adopt any or a combination of the conflict management strategies above to constructively transform conflicts to enhance organizational growth and development and to build peaceful relationships across the strata of the workplace. To this end, this paper proposes the framework below for the prevention and management of conflicts in the workplace.

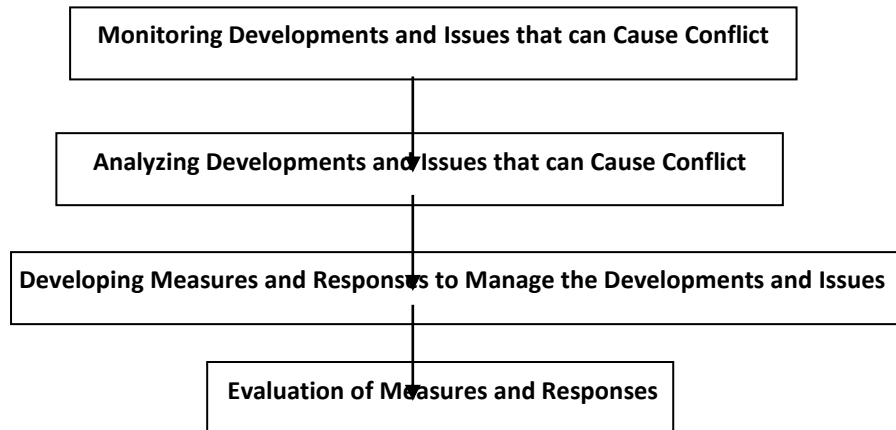**Conflict Prevention and Management Framework for Dealing with Workplace Conflicts**

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│     Monitoring Developments and Issues that can Cause Conflict │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘

      ┌───────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
      │   Analyzing Developments and Issues that can Cause Conflict │
      └───────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘

┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│ Developing Measures and Responses to Manage the Developments and Issues │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘

            ┌─────────────────────────────────────────┐
            │      Evaluation of Measures and Responses │
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Fig: 1 Conflict framework for dealing with workplace conflict

Monitoring developments and issues that can cause conflicts in the workplace:

- These include complaints and agitations from union or employees on issues such as: workers' welfare-salary issues, promotion issues, victimization of employees or union members, imbalance power structure between management and union or employees.
- Developments, such as: changes in the structure of organization, leadership change, changes in the structure of national or global economies, decline in the profit and capital base of organisation.

Analyzing developments and issues that can cause conflict in the workplace:

- Use of conflict analytical tools and early warning systems to pre-empt, detect and address developments and issues that can engender conflicts in the workplace.
- Needs assessment analysis of organizations and their employees.
- Strategic assessment analysis of developments and issues capable of generating conflicts in the workplace.

Developing measures and responses to deal with developments and issues that can cause conflict:

- Employing conflict management strategies like: negotiation, mediation, conciliation, and arbitration to resolve conflicts in the workplace.
- Adoption of policy measures and decisions to prevent and manage developments and issues that can cause conflict in the workplace.
- Inauguration of joint and consultative interactions between management and labour/employees in formulating organizational policies that can guarantee harmony in the workplace.

The framework above shows the step by step stages of monitoring, analyzing, and developing measures/responses to manage developments and issues that can lead to conflicts in the workplace and evaluation of the measures and responses if they are effective or defective to prevent and manage outbreaks of conflicts in the workplace. In order to efficiently prevent and manage conflicts in the workplace, managers need to employ the framework above to detect, contain and regulate conflicts in the workplace, so that they do not threaten harmony and productive activities.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The challenges of managing industrial conflicts in this era of global economic recession are enormous due to the proliferation of conflicts in organizations coupled with the complexities of such conflicts. However, the importance of peace as a powerful social force for progress and development of organization cannot be overemphasized. This is because a "sound and harmonious industrial relations in an enterprise is essential not only to employers and workers but also to the society because efficient production of goods and services depends on it" (Osabuohien and Ogunrinola, 2007). The study therefore concludes that conflicts in the workplace can have deleterious consequences on productive activities if they are not promptly and properly managed with the appropriate conflict management strategies. More importantly, proper detection, prevention and

management of developments and issues that can engender conflicts in the workplace can help to minimize the negative consequences of conflict in the workplace and as well maximize the positive outcomes of conflicts in the workplace. In view of the discussion thus far, the following recommendations are made:

1. Employers must deem it fit to regularly organize capacity building seminars and workshops on conflict prevention and management for their managers, labour union and employees to build their skills in the act of conflicts resolution so that they can resolve conflict peacefully.

2. The management of every organization must also ensure that they promptly attend to issues and developments that can engender conflicts in the workplace. This will enable them to come up with proper policies and responses to deal with issues and developments that would have led to conflicts.

3. Every organization must always open up communication channels in the workplace for employees and labour unions to register their grievance and management must promptly respond to such grievances.

4. Management of organizations and labour unions must develop the culture of embracing peaceful dialogue in resolving conflicts.

5. Management must always ensure that employees are actively and regularly involved in the process of decision-making, especially on issues that concern employees.

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