

Challenges Facing Managers in Managing Conflict in Schools in the South and South Central Regions of Botswana

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The purpose of this study was to examine the challenges facing managers in managing conflict in schools of South and South Central Regions of Botswana. In this study, the schedule of interview was used to collect empirical data. A random sample of 50 school managers and deputy school managers was selected for interviews. Major findings of the study revealed that school managers do not perceive conflict as an inevitable phenomenon that is real in any organization. They lack skills and strategies of handling conflict positively to produce good results. The study recommended that school managers should be trained on the importance and benefits of conflict. This training in conflict management will give them a skill that can enable them to turn conflict erupting in their schools into a positive force that can bring a positive change.

Keywords: conflict, conflict management, sources of conflict, conflict management strategies

Introduction and Background

This study focuses on the challenges facing educational managers in managing conflict in their schools. Conflict is an inevitable organizational reality that can bring negative or positive consequences within the organization. Conflict may lead to some disagreements in the organization, which might lead to good communication in an organization. This results in compromise or further appreciation of opposite views. According to Hoban (2004), the consequences of conflict can be described as positive. On the other hand, disagreement can result in polarization of viewpoints. Daresh (2002) argued that it can lead to the end of communication and personal animosity among members within the organization. In this case, the results of conflict bring about negative effects to the running of the organization.

Educational managers are charged with the responsibility of coming up with better ways of handling conflict in their schools. Namara (2002) emphasized that where possible they should come up with good tactics or strategies of managing conflict or guidelines of preventing it. Due to the size of the country and its sparse population, CJSS (Botswana community junior secondary schools) are scattered all over the country. The MOE (Ministry of Education) manages these schools and supplies and manages their resources. It is also responsible for the professional functions of teachers through its branches which are SDoE (Secondary Department of Education) and TSM (teaching service management). The SDoE is responsible for looking after 200 CJSS with the senior secondary school and it does this through its education officers based on different regions. Their role

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is to supervise and ensure quality education system (MOE, 2000). The aim of TSM is to deploy teachers and it further deals with the welfare of teachers.

The duty of the Department of Curriculum Development and Evaluation Designs is to design, review and revise curriculum to meet the socio-economic needs of the country and that of individuals (Ministry of Education, 2000). MOE (2000) emphasized that schools should operate through the management of both senior management teams which comprise the school head, deputy school head and heads of departments, and school management teams which comprise of members of senior management and senior teachers of Grade one. Both management teams supervise, facilitate, make decision, act as instructional leaders, are responsible for staff and students welfare and ensure good relations within the schools. They are also responsible for managing day-to-day school operation (MOE, 2000).

Most of the managers in the education system rise to these positions without any prior management training. Some get these positions because of their long-service in the system, while others assume them because of their flowery curriculum vitae or having excelled in the interview (Bramson, 2004). This, therefore, suggests that SMT (school management team) should know the sources of conflict and strategies that can be used in reducing conflict in the workplace. For these reasons, sources and strategies of conflict management are discussed hereunder.

Sources of Conflict

It is clear that there is no organization without conflict. Hoban (2004) argued that in a school set-up incompatible goals occur because of reasons, such as a clash of personalities, personal value, lack or limited resources and others.

A Clash of Personalities

A clash of personalities occurs when an intense and highly energetic teacher has to work in the same environment with a slower and less intense teacher. In this case, the one who is a hard worker becomes irritated by the sloppiness and laziness of the colleague.

Personal Value

This becomes a cause of conflict due to diverging ideas or different perceptions of the same situation (Peterson, 2001). The difference in perception results in different people attaching different meaning to stimuli. Resolving value conflict does not mean that the disputants must change or agree on their values, but a mutual acknowledgement that each person views the situation differently is the first step.

Limited Resources

In most organization, resources are scarce and limited, which leads to individuals and groups to scramble or compete for their share (Hoban, 2004). This normally occurs when different parties have different priorities over scarce resource management and policy development. They involve a combination of economic, value and power sources. This is normally beyond the traditional management system.

Departmentalization and Specialization

Most organizations are divided into separate departments with specialized functions. Van Deventer and Kruger (2003) and Hoban (2004) argued that, because of familiarity with the manner in which they undertake their activities, departments tend to turn inwards and concentrate on the achievements of their own aims. This type of conflict may involve turf problems and overlapping responsibilities (Legotlo, Teu, & Matshidiso, 2003).

They went on to argue that this conflict occurs when one department attempts to assume more control or take credit for desirable activities, or give up its part and any responsibilities for undesirable activities.

Status Struggle

This occurs when one attempts to improve its status while another group views this as a threat to its place in the hierarchy (Legotlo et al., 2003). According to Van Deventer and Kruger (2003), a person's perception of unjust treatment, such as the implementation of personnel policies and practices or in reward and punishment systems can lead to tension and conflict.

Role Expectations

Role expectations involve real differences in role or responsibilities among individuals who are interdependent in a work environment (Fisher, 2000). Daresh (2002) described it as the misalignment between the requirements of doing the job and the person selected to do the job. The conflict of role expectations occurs when different people including the person filling the post or the role disagree on how that role should be performed (Legotlo et al., 2003). The emotional extent is quite huge since human beings are involved and, in most cases, it is easy to personal the issue.

Environmental Change

Legotlo et al. (2003) and Van Deventer and Kruger (2003) argued that the changes in the organization's external environment can cause a major area of conflict. These could be changes in the education system that can either be a situation of political changes and teacher-learner ratio at some schools.

Communication Block

Legotlo et al. (2003) and Gerardi (2004) indicated that communication block develops because not all groups have the same information. Each group, therefore, takes a stand on its view of the world and the information it has. According to Legotlo et al. (2003), communication problems frequently lead to conflict among people. If the school lacks proper communication, the situation can lead to antagonism and escalate and complicate conflict.

Conflict Management Strategies

According to Daresh (2002), Green et al. (2002) and Hanson (2003), conflict situations offer individuals an opportunity to choose a style they believe is more appropriate to responding to the prevailing conflict. The following are conflict management styles that can be adopted by educational managers in dealing with conflict in their schools.

Cooperative Problem-Solving Strategy

When using this style, people try to find a solution that will help them meet their interests and help everyone maintain good relationships. Dolphins are an example of this style. They whistle and click to communicate with each other to catch food cooperatively and summon help. But, they may choose other styles depending on the situation (Green, Glenford, & Plow, 2002; Hanson, 2003).

Competing

Choosing this style means that a person is putting his/her interest before anyone else's interests. Some people who use this style try so hard to get what they want irrespective of whether or not they ruin the friendship. A lion is a symbol of this style. For example, when the lion's family is hungry, the lion may use its strength and loud roar to get the food, because it is important for the family (Daresh, 2002; Green et al., 2002).

Compromising

People choose this style when it is important to satisfy some of their interests, but not all of them. They might say that let us split the difference for something better than nothing. A zebra is a symbol of this style. Zebras's unique look seems to indicate that it does not care if it is a black or white horse, so it "splits the difference" and chooses black and white stripes, but it may choose other styles depending on the situation (Green et al., 2002; Hanson, 2003).

Avoiding

People choosing this style do not get in a conflict, they might say "You decide and leave me out of it". A turtle is a symbol of this style, because it can avoid everything by pulling its legs and head into its shell to get away from everyone. It also chooses other styles, because it does not always have to stay in its shell (Green et al., 2002; Hanson, 2003).

Accommodating

People choosing this style put their interests last and let others have what they want. They believe that keeping a relationship is more important than anything else. A chameleon is a symbol of this style because it changes its color to match that of its environment. It also uses other styles depending on the situation (Daresh, 2002; Green et al., 2002).

Statement of the Problem

The school managers of CJSS around South and South Central Regions in Botswana are faced many challenges with an attempt to resolve conflict in their schools. A number of them, if not all, have not been trained in conflict management (Garegae-Garekwe, 1999). According to Garegae-Garekwe (1999), educational managers in schools have not developed sensitivity to potential conflicts both inside and outside the school. As a result, conflict that occurs in schools takes them by surprise and this leads to confusion and frustration.

The following are the research questions that guided and provided focus of the study:

- (1) What are the causes of conflict in schools?
- (2) Are the school managers adequately trained in conflict management?
- (3) Which strategies are mostly adopted in managing conflict in the selected schools?

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The main aim of this study is to investigate challenges faced by educational managers in managing conflict in the CJSS around South and South Central Regions in Botswana. The following are the objectives of the study:

- (1) To investigate the causes of conflict in schools;
- (2) To find out whether school managers are adequately trained in conflict management;
- (3) To investigate the strategies mostly adopted in managing conflict.

Significance of the Study

Underlying this study is the conviction that mishandling and mismanagement of conflict are the factors that hinder productivity and de-motivate staff, frustrate, anger and stress members. Based on this, MOE will ensure that educational managers receive adequate training in conflict management.

Research Design and Research Methodology

In this study, both literature and empirical investigations were conducted to gather more data on the

conflict management challenges faced by educational managers in CJSS around South and South Central Regions in Botswana.

Literature Study

A thorough study of primary and secondary sources was used to collect more information on the challenges concerning conflict management faced by educational managers in CJSS around South and South Central Regions in Botswana. The literature study also provides a theoretical background to an empirical study by means of interviews that helped in the recommendations and conclusions of this study.

Empirical Investigation

In this study, qualitative approach was used and interviews as research instrument to collect data from the respondents. According to MacMillan and Schumacher (2001) and Wiersma and Jurs (2005), the qualitative approach provides verbal descriptions to portray the richness and complexity of events that occur in natural settings from the participants' perspectives. Once collected, the data are analyzed inductively to generate findings. The researcher chose it, because it allows for an inductive form of reasoning, and generalisation is the point of departure. It is in the form of themes and categories and allows for easier data analysis and there were no fixed rules that were used. In this study, deputy school managers and school managers were interviewed regarding the challenges they experienced in managing conflicts in their schools.

Population and Sampling

Population

MacMillan and Schumacher (2001) defined population as a group of elements or cases, whether individuals, objects or events, that conform to specific criteria and to which we intend to generalise the results of the research. In this study, population included CJSS in South and South Central regions of Botswana. These schools were chosen, because it was where conflict was being experienced mostly.

Sampling

According to MacMillan and Schumacher (2001), the smaller group or the subset is the sample. According to Monobe (2005), a sample is a group which is selected from the population and is thus less than the population, while remaining as representative as possible. In this study, sampling included 50 school managers and deputy school managers.

Data Analysis and Interpretations

An analysis of data in this section was done according to the research questions. The instrument was administered to 50 school heads and their deputies, but the researcher managed to interview 49. The analysis is as follows.

Question 1: Do You Experience Conflict in Your Institution?

The respondents agreed that they experience conflict in their institutions. This is in keeping with what Donais (2006) said that much conflict exists in every workplace. It is important to understand that conflict has the potential to either destruct or create a positive social change.

Question 2: What Are the Sources of Conflict in Your Institution?

The respondents indicated that, in most cases, the sources of conflict in their schools included lack of resources, for example, teachers fighting over the limited classrooms, laboratories as well as teaching and learning materials. They explained that clashes of personalities erupt more often when teachers are made to

share a house due to lack of accommodation. They also indicated that due to their lack of communication skills, there tended to be a communication breakdown between the teaching staff and the administration. These data tend to agree with what was said in the literature (Legotlo et al., 2003; Van Deventer & Kruger, 2003; Hoban, 2004; Gerardi, 2004).

Question 3: Are You Able to Sense Conflict Before It Occurs?

The respondents indicated that conflict was realized at the time when it surfaced and at a stage where it demanded for good and advanced strategies to manage it. This simply suggests that educational managers are not able to sense conflict before it occurs.

Question 4: From Your Experience, Can You Say Conflict Is Good or Bad? Motivate Your Response.

The respondents said conflict was neither good nor bad depending on how it was handled. They stated that if it was properly handled, it could improve the running and productivity of the institution. They further indicated that if mishandled, it could cause dissatisfaction among staff members and thus could disrupt the running of the school.

Question 5: Have You Ever Gone for Any Management Training Before Assuming the Managerial Post?

Some respondents indicated that they went for in-service training before assuming the managerial post. They complained that, they were not adequately trained in managing conflict and hence they were facing so many managerial problems.

Major Research Findings

In view of the presented data in paragraph 6, the major findings regarding the improvement of the management of conflict in schools are summarized hereunder. Conflict exists in any organization and there is no way it could be avoided, but it is vital for the manager to know how to handle it. Depending on how you handle conflict, it may bring positive or negative results (Dessler, 2001; Hoban, 2004).

Question 1: What Are the Causes of Conflict in Schools?

The school managers and deputy managers indicated the following as some of the causes of conflict in schools that:

- (1) Clashes of personalities cause conflict in schools;
- (2) Communication breakdown is a problem in schools;
- (3) Limited or lack of resources also causes conflict in schools.

Question 2: Are the School Managers Adequately Trained in Conflict Management?

When resolving conflict, the educational managers indicated that they could use collaboration, avoiding, competing and compromising strategies, depending on the conflict being handled (Daresh, 2002; Green et al., 2002). Educational managers assuming the responsibility without prior and adequate training cause a problem.

Question 3: Which Strategies Are Mostly Adopted in Managing Conflict in the Selected Schools?

The school managers and deputy managers indicated that the dominating strategies they mostly use are accommodating, avoidance, competing and compromising. People choose this style when it is important to satisfy some of their interests, but not all of them.

Conclusions

Little has been done as far as equipping managers with conflict resolution skills in JCSS of South and

South Central Regions in Botswana. This will help managers to no longer perceive conflict in the context of traditional point of view, where it is looked upon as a sign of non-performance and malfunctioning in the group, but rather in an integrationist's view where conflict is perceived as a natural ingredient and a positive force that is necessary for a group to perform effectively (Robbins, 2003).

From the findings, most managers do not have the skills to distribute the limited resources fairly or expand their base where possible. They also lack the skill of communicating properly to their members of staff, this also leads. It is time managers are fully trained in conflict management skills so that they will be able to turn conflict that could, otherwise, be dysfunctional to be functional and that could bring positive development and change in schools. As revealed by the findings of literature review, conflict cannot be eradicated but should be used to unite the staff and pressurize them to search for new ideas. From literature review, most authors jointly agreed that conflict management is the key managerial skill that every manager should possess (Namara, 2002). A common consensus is that if conflict is not handled properly, it can cripple the day-to-day running of any institution and negatively impact on productivity, paralyze decision-making and prevent the achievement of organizational aims (Van Deventer & Kruger, 2003).

Recommendations

Training in conflict management will give them skills that can enable them to turn conflict erupting in their schools into a positive force that can bring positive change. This training will make them understand that conflict is inevitable, so it should not be perceived as a negative force that hampers productivity, but a force that leads to personal development and innovation. When people assume responsibility, they need training which covers the strategies of managing conflict in their institutions. They must know how and when to choose a particular strategy that will suit the situation.

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