

Chapter 8

Collective Bargaining as a Tool for Industrial Conflict in Organization and Conflict Resolution

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ABSTRACT

The major factor militating against organizational productivity is conflict between individuals or groups of individuals and the management. In any work situation, people are bound to have different interests and aspirations which may tend to conflict with each other. For example, management is committed to pursuing a goal of profit maximization policies, while the workers through their unions want higher wages and a lucrative welfare package which tends to result in higher cost of doing business to the management. At times, unions want effective participation in most organizational decisions, even at the expense of encroaching on areas that fall exclusively within the confines of management prerogatives. Management cannot but resist this unwholesome behaviour. In the process, conflict would ensue. Therefore, an important duty of line for managers to promote organizational productivity is through peaceful resolution of conflicts in the organization.

INTRODUCTION

Conflicts are inevitable part of organizational life since the goals of different stakeholders such as managers and workers are often incompatible. It is an unpleasant fact in any organization as long as people disagree over factors such as interest, views, style of management among others. This is because the establishment and continuous existence of organization through the realization of set goals and objectives requires the continuous and effective functioning of its material input with the human element being

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indispensable. This results into a situation whereby they frustrate each other in an attempt to achieve their objectives. According to Azamosa (2004), conflict is a state of disagreement over issues of substance or emotional antagonism and may arise due to anger, mistrust or personality clashes. Irrespective of the factors resulting in conflict, it has been observed that industrial conflicts produce considerable effects on organizations and should be consciously managed as much as possible. While conflict is generally perceived as dysfunctional, it can also be beneficial because it may cause an issue to be presented in different perspectives. Conflict has both positive and negative effects on organisation and management. It can be positive when it encourages creativity, new looks at old conditions, the clarification of points of view, and the development of human capabilities to handle interpersonal differences. Conflict can be negative when it creates resistance to change, establishes turmoil in organisation or interpersonal relations, fosters distrust, builds a feeling of defeat, or widens the chasm of misunderstanding. Hence management are duty bound to resolve conflicts properly for the sake of increasing organizational performance because the result of such action will result to good communication, time management, good cooperation and increase organizational performance. A good conflict improves decision outcomes and group productivity.

Most conflicts between management and their workers often start as mere grievances; and when badly handled, they result into disruptive conflicts that often inhibit cooperative efforts. A grievance can be defined as an alleged violation of the rights of an employee. It is a manifestation of dissatisfaction. It is usually expressed in writing or oral against a specific act or action of management or its agents on any work related matter. A grievance arises out of an action or inaction on the part of management that is injuries, detrimental or likely to be detrimental to the interest of the aggrieved. Once a grievance is filed and it is properly looked into; and appropriate restitution is made where necessary, the fire or an outburst of bigger crisis or conflict would have been put off. For example, the conflict and disagreement between university staff (teaching and non-teaching staff) over entitlement to increase in salaries could be resolve amicably if the parties concerned decide to resolve the issue in a give and take manner.

Conflict could be functional or dysfunctional. Conflict could be functional if it is resolve amicably, while it is dysfunctional if the parties concerned decide to fight it legally and illegally to the bitter end. Dysfunctional conflict may result in low productivity, loss of human energy, loss of time and money, decreased co-operation, low morale, resentment and frustration. Reversely, functional conflict results in creativity, increased motivation, increased participation, and productivity. Besides, every aspect of labour-management relations can breed conflict. Some conflicts may be mild while some can be very destructive. A little and inconsequential disagreement or grievance that ought to have been thrashed out and resolved peacefully on the basis of "give and take" may turn out to be an all-consuming fire.

According to Henry (2009), organizational conflict can be regarded as a dispute that occurs when interests, goals or values of different individuals or groups are incompatible with each other or when people compete for jobs, resources, power, recognition and security. Rahim (2001) opined that conflict may be interpersonal or inter group. The interpersonal conflicts occur between a supervisor and his subordinates or between two individuals at the same level of the organisation hierarchy while inter group conflicts often occur between two trade unions, between two departments or between management and workers when attempting to implement the policies and programme of the organisation. According to Patterson (2000), strikes constitute militant and organized protest against existing industrial relations. They are symptoms of industrial unrest which needs to be resolved for organizational growth and development. Deakin (2000), described industrial conflict as any disagreement or dispute between workers and works or between workers and employers regarding the condition of employments of workers and the general

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