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Conflict Situations and Their Management Regarding Sports Competitions among Students in Central – Western Zone of Colleges of Education in Ghana

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Abstract:

The purpose of this study was to conduct descriptive survey of the causes of conflict situations and their management during sports competitions among students in the colleges of Education in the Central Western zone. Data was collected from a sample size of 369 respondents. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics. The study revealed that the most common source of conflict among students during sports competitions includes; personality incompatibility with reference to intolerance of certain deviant behavior, feeling of superiority of some students over others, the desire to win competition at all cost, spread of unkind gossips about one another, differences in perceptions and goals, among others. It was also revealed the most common management techniques used to minimize the occurrence of conflict includes; compromising, accommodating, collaboration and avoidance.

Keywords: Conflict, management, conflict resolution, compromising, accommodating, collaboration, avoidance

1. Introduction

Incidence of conflict can be found within all human establishments of which educational institutions are no exception. Conflict is inevitable when people come together in groups to pursue various goals. It forms part of our everyday life situations. It is an unavoidable aspect of modern life. Once people from different communal, racial, religious, political and economic settings are assembled together, the opportunity for conflict increases. This also means conflict in general is pervasive and may happen in any organization, institutions inclusive. It is, therefore, not surprising those gatherings such as Central-Western zone sports competitions may be besieged with its fair share of conflict.

Kreitner and Kinicki (2001) were of the view that conflict is a situation in which an effort is made by someone to offset the efforts of another by some form of blocking that will result in frustrating the other in attaining goals and interests. They further stated that the parties to a conflict may be individuals or groups because institutions bring together people with diverse backgrounds. They stress that conflicts and disputes are, therefore, part of life of any human institution. Therefore, there is no society or interpersonal relationship which does not experience conflict at some time or another as part of social life.

Conflict is a serious disagreement, arising out of differences of opinion, wishes, needs, values, and interests between and among individuals or groups (Hornby, 1995). It is also a struggle between and among individuals and groups over values and claims to scarce resources, status symbols, and power bases. The objective of individuals or groups engaged in conflict is to neutralize, injure, or eliminate their rivals so that they can enjoy the scarce resources and the status symbols (Coser, 1965).

A potential for conflict exists whenever and wherever people have contact (Barker, Kathy, Kittie, & Robert, 2001). As people are organized into groups to seek a common goal, the probability of conflict greatly increases since individuals may dislike certain people with whom they come into frequent contact. There are disagreements with family members, friends, and co-workers and even people we meet for the first time. These conflict situations appear with frequency in daily, public, and private life and may be either on a small or large scale.

The existence of conflict may be triggered by ethnic, racial, religious, economic differences, or may arise from differences in values, beliefs and attitudes regarding issues. A conflict may become violent, and in extreme cases, leading to destruction and bloodshed. This does not necessarily mean that all conflicts are bound to lead to violence; the situation becomes so when the process turns to overt hostility that involves destructive behaviour (Robinson, 1972).

Conflict in organizations can range from trivial to tragic and may occur within the individual, between people, and between groups. It is closely related to change and interpersonal transactions. As people come together to satisfy a wide range of emotional needs, social relations in general are swamped with conflict. As people interact, they deal with differences as well

as similarities; with strong dislikes as well as attractions (Kreitner, 1998). In social relations, Sigmund Freud's parallel of humans and porcupines is suitable. Freud intimates that like porcupines, people prick and injure one another if they get close, and feel cold if they get too far apart.

One school of thought feels the term conflict has a strong negative connotation, evoking words such as rivalry, anger and violence. Another school of thought, however, feels conflict does not have to be negative experience. It can serve as an important positive force in the achievement of organizational goals. Conflict, however, is an everyday certainty with both benefits and costs. In recent times, it was inferred that organizational conflict of any type was detrimental and should be eradicated. Now, however, the potential positive outcomes of conflicts such as providing feedback, indicating the need for change, making supervisors aware of problems and increasing motivation are being recognized. Wright and Noe (1996) intimated that because conflict is usually uncomfortable, people tend to think of it as bad. They were, however, of the view that if people handled a conflict with mutual respect and trust and achieved an outcome that was favorable to the organization, conflict could be a positive force.

2. Statement of the Problem

Conflicts are unavoidable in every human establishment where different people have to co-exist for a common purpose. Educational institutions games and sports competitions are not exceptional with respect to conflict, especially where laurels are at stake to be won by various colleges in different disciplines and events.

Central-Western Zone of Colleges of Education comprises of heterogeneous groups of two female institutions and four mixed institutions headed by four female principals and two male principals. One of them chairs the affairs of the zone including various sports competitions. The variety of members of the zone including staff and students regarding traditional background, sex, academic qualification, subject discipline and religious inclination create fertile grounds for conflicts within groups, between groups, and among individuals. Although conflicts are sometimes necessary in a community to generate arguments over certain decisions to make them acceptable to all factions, they can create a great deal of confusion and administrative and organizational problems to educational institutions and groupings. Conflicts can generate undue crises and disciplinary problems to both students' leadership, staff, and administration resulting in hatred and tarnishing of hard earned reputation. Conflict must, therefore, be resolved as early as identified to facilitate good administration and organization.

Conflict situations are created by varied factors and so the types and nature of conflicts differ from one institution to the other. The type of conflict resolution strategy adopted for various institutions or situations must be based on the nature and types of conflict. In Central-Western Zone of Colleges of Education, it was obvious that various types of conflicts were witnessed in the past six years during zonal competitions and nobody could accurately tell what actually caused them and how to curtail them. It was, therefore, extremely difficult for the administration and organizers to strategize measures to deal with conflicts which disrupted various sports competitions in the zone. The phenomenon was also destroying the purpose of sports in the zone thus creating enmity among various members. There was, therefore, the need for an empirical study of the conflicts in the zone to facilitate formulation of resolution strategies. This study was in response to the aforementioned need.

2.1. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to identify and analyze conflict situations in sports competitions and their subsequent management in the Central-Western Zone of Colleges of Education in Ghana.

2.2. Research Questions

- What were the possible causes of conflicts during sports competition among students?
- What management techniques can be used to prevent sport-related conflicts?

3. Methodology

Descriptive survey design was used. The target population for the study was four thousand, six hundred and eighty-one (4,681) student trainees and tutors in the six colleges of education in the central-western zone in the 2009/2010 academic year. The six colleges being referred to were OLA, Holy Child, Fosu, Komenda, Wiawso and Enchi.

A sample size of three hundred and sixty-nine (369) respondents was used for the study. The stratified sampling and simple random sampling methods were used to select the sample. The six colleges were put into six strata with each college forming one stratum. Since the population in the colleges differed, the proportional sampling in selecting the number of respondents from each college was used.

The instrument developed for the study was a questionnaire. Respondents were requested to respond to each item on a four-point Likert scale.

4. Results/Discussion

Research question one for the study sought to find out the causes of conflict among students during sport competitions in Central-western zone of Colleges of Education. The findings are presented in Table 1.

Causes of Conflict among Students during Sports Competitions in Colleges of Education in Central-western Zone

Sources of Conflict	SA Freq. %	A Freq. %	D Freq. %	SD Freq. %
Contradictory information	59 (16.0)	169 (45.8)	100(27.1)	41 (11.1)
Different perceptions	141 (38.2)	199 (54.0)	19(5.1)	10 (2.7)
Desire to win competition at all cost	171 (46.3)	146 (40.0)	32(8.7)	20 (5.4)
Personality differences	175 (47.4)	142 (38.5)	29(7.9)	23 (6.2)
Abrupt changes	89 (24.2)	220 (59.6)	40(10.8)	20 (5.4)
Superiority over Others	174 (47.2)	133 (36.0)	43 (11.7)	19 (5.1)
Spreading gossips	170 (46.1)	148 (40.1)	31 (8.4)	20 (5.4)

Table 1

SA= Strongly Agree A= Agree D= Disagree SD= Strongly Agree

From Table 1 it can be discerned that the most common source of conflict among students during sports competitions in the Colleges of Educations in Central-western zone was personality incompatibility with reference to intolerance of certain deviant behaviour. The number of respondents who strongly agreed that personality incompatibility is a source of conflict was 175 (47.4%), 142 (38.5%) agreed, while 29 (7.9%) disagreed and 23 (6.2%) strongly disagreed to the statement. This confirms Hatch's (1997) claim that personality incompatibility is a human factor which can lead to conflict. Intolerant behaviour such as making derogatory remarks and casting insinuations by individuals or groups can be a source of worry not only to other individuals but also to all members of the groups if not the entire contingent. This kind of conflict can also be termed as 'relationship' conflict (Gibson, Ivancevich, Donnelly and Konopaske, 2003). Since it normally occurs among group members or groups it can lead to feelings of dislike, tension, irritation and frustration. The finding is also consistent with Kreitner and Kinicki's (2004) assertion that conflict begins with seemingly insignificant irritations with an individual growing deeply to dislike someone in the next group who persistently casts insinuations and makes derogatory remarks while drumming. They referred to it as incivility among individuals or groups and needed to be avoided within an organizational culture that places a high value on respect for members. Similarly, Bramson (1994), Brinkman and Kirschner (1994) added that most of the conflicts attributed to personality are the results of personality incompatibilities.

This can also be likened to the statement made by Boo the, Bradley, Flick, Keough (1993) that certain people are generally more difficult to work with than others. For instance, open-minded people who feel good about themselves are less involved in conflict than people who are dogmatic and have low esteem. Negative social behaviours seem related to low academic achievement.

It was also found that some of the personality incompatibility stemmed out of the fact that some students smoked Indian hemp and drank alcoholic beverages so heavily that they ended up demonstrating deviant behaviours. During a zonal competition, one group of individuals or groups would want to compete and win laurels by complying with all rules and regulations while another group of individuals or groups would desire to put up deviant behaviour. The latter category of students attends the competition to compete or give support to their teams. They go about pilfering, petty items like food, mobile phones, money and some personal belongings. Some go about snatching boyfriends (lovers) or girlfriends (lovers) from others.

The feeling of superiority of some students over others is the second common source of conflict among students during zonal sports competition in Central-western zone of Colleges of Education. Out of the total (369) respondents, 174 (47.2%) strongly agreed, 133 (36.0%) agreed whereas 19 (5.1%) strongly disagreed and 43 (11.7%) disagreed that the feeling of superiority of some students over others is a source of conflict. This reveals that some students feel superior over others. As far as students are concerned, there is no ground for any student to assume the status of superiority over others. The Colleges of Education are unlike the second cycle schools where seniority is so much cherished. This finding contradicts the source of conflict Hatch (1997) refers to as "status incongruity". According to her, status incongruity becomes a source of conflict only when lower status groups influence higher status groups but the reverse of it is acceptable, meanwhile among the students' community, no group of students can be classified as either holding a higher status or a lower status.

In the view of Mullins (2005) the existence of superiority calls for inequitable treatment and practices, such as in reward and punishment systems thereby leading to the creation of tension and conflict. When a differential reward structure is used for two or more groups or departments, conflict is likely to occur and it is more prevalent if groups perceive they are competing for the same or limited resources. For instance, in the colleges system there are rules and regulations guiding the conduct of students during sports competitions in Ghana. There is likelihood of conflict when students who go contrary to these rules and regulations are not punished adequately.

The feeling of superiority of some students over others is consistent with Mack's (2000) contention that some groups believe that their way of thinking and doing things is not only the best but also the only right way. Sociologists refer to it as "ethnocentrism". Ethnocentrism is an important source of and a contributing factor to the continuity of conflict in the Colleges of Education during sports competition in Central-Western zone. Respondents expressed their dissatisfaction with ethnocentrism and nepotism in the Colleges of Education, especially during zonal sports competitions. The issue of power and superiority based on research findings is manifested during general discussions of students.

The third source of conflict found out from respondents was the desire to win competition at all cost. The results indicate that 171 (46.3%) and 146 (40%) of the respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that the desire to win sports competition was a source of conflict while 32 (8.7%) and 20 (5.4%) disagreed or strongly disagreed to the assertion. I gathered from the respondents that as a result of the desire to win at all cost, some embark upon all kinds of foul means such as fielding of unqualified students, robust form of playing, use of provocative words, denying other competing groups the use of certain essential services and amenities and threats. All these are undertaken to have upper hand or suppress the other competing groups.

The fourth common source of conflict realized from the responses was the spread of unkind gossips about one another. The results revealed that 170 (46.1%) strongly agreed, 148 (40.1%) agreed, 20 (5.4%) strongly disagreed whereas 31 (8.4%) disagreed. I could fathom that majority of the respondents agreed that spreading unkind gossip about others was one of the fundamental causes of conflict. This finding buttresses Mensa-Bonsu and Effah (2003) assertion that the source of this type of conflict is behavioural. They maintain that it is through the making of unreasonable demands that one can lie or spread unkind gossip about others, and that institutions that harbour such character-traits do not enjoy peace in any form. This is tantamount to blackmailing, which can be detrimental to lives either individually or collectively. Individuals must therefore learn to engage in quality conversations. Information gathered from the studies revealed that students use most of their group meetings to gossip about others who are not part of their groups. Some of the gossips are so detrimental that they go a long way to tarnish the image of the victims.

Another common source of conflict in the Colleges of Education during sports competition in Central-Western zone was differences in perceptions and goals. Results of the study indicate that out of the total of 369 respondents, the total number of agreement 340 (92.8%) far exceeded the total number of disagreement which was 29 (7.8%). The finding gives credence to the assertion that "Differences in goals can be accompanied by differing perceptions of reality" (Gibson et al., 2003). The fact that the College of Education as well as the zone is made up of people from different walks of life makes it inevitable that each may have a different way of looking at a problem. Sometimes one may view a particular problem at hand as critical while another will only brush it over. Due to the differences in goals, conflict can result when these individuals interact; the differences in values or perception among members of various units in the organization are frequently accompanied by differences in attitudes that could also lead to conflict. For instance, some students may disagree with one another on an action to be taken (causing abrupt end of a match). These differences may start as a mere argument but if it lacks the intervention of a third force, it can lead to a serious conflict among members in the groups.

The results concerning common sources of conflict among students during zonal competition again reveal that changes, especially when they occur abruptly and unpredictably, are potential as far as conflict is concerned. Out of the total respondents, 89 (24.2%) and 220 (54.6%) of the respondents strongly agreed and agreed to the statement, respectively, while 40 (10.8%) and 20 (5.4%) either disagreed or strongly disagreed. I can conclude that the occurrence of change has a potential to cause a conflict within an individual or groups especially when the change is abrupt that is no prior notice was given to those to be affected by it. A change causing conflict can be as a result of the personal desire not to lose some advantages or the lack of appreciation for the intended purpose of the change. It is normally so when the advantages likely to be accrued from the change are not clear in the minds of individuals involved. Sometimes forces may have been at work for a long time to cause a change, but it can be a source of worry when it appears suddenly. It then ends up provoking anger, anxiety and confusion. People may prefer secure, predictable patterns of responses to the unknown, unpredictable responses. This is further corroborated by Kuutson and Kowitz (1977) when they reiterated that a change in one variable may produce changes in others, because the system is continuously changing, there can be a possibility of experiencing more than one type of conflict, simultaneously. The effect of change on the individual is in many and several ways. Psychologically, a change in one's activity or direction can lead to fear and shock. The abrupt exposure of change puts one in a state of uncertainty which can also lead to insecurity especially acute changes involving work schedules.

Responses gathered from the study also indicate that students became disturbed when the authorities asked them to perform certain activities meant for other days, eat certain foods not planned for, and sleep at unsuitable places they were not informed about. Students usually felt such changes were too sudden and would have been better if they were informed beforehand to make necessary adjustment to the changes.

The results of the analysis to the statement "contradictory information as a source of conflict" show that 59 (16.0%) of the respondents strongly agreed, 169 (45.8%) agreed, 100 (27.1%) disagreed while 41 (11.1%) strongly disagreed. Contradictory information can sometimes stem out from poor communication. The finding of this study gives further proof to the assertion by Robbins (1983) that semantic difficulties, insufficient exchange of information and noise in the communication channel are barriers to communication and potential antecedent conditions to conflict. Sometimes when individuals in a group speak different languages, they are less likely to agree on issues, thereby reading different meanings into whatever one says. Conflict is more likely to occur when communication is not clear and there is confusion about what to believe and not believe. My interaction with respondents revealed that sometimes the rumour mill becomes so loud that students get confused as to what to believe. An example is accommodation arrangement for students in a games village during a zonal competition, where various forms of information were spread that some rooms meant for certain colleges/groups were changed by removing the labels placed on the doors and replacing them with other ones.

From the analysis so far, the common sources of conflict among students are personality incompatibility; feeling of superiority over others; desire to win competition at all cost; spreading unkind gossips about each other; different perceptions; changes occurring abruptly and unpredictably and contradictory information.

Research question two for the study sought to discover the type of conflict management techniques used in the Central-Western zone in a conflict situation. The responses are presented in Table 2.

Conflict Management Techniques	Rare Freq %	Occasionally Freq %	Regularly Freq %	Always Freq %
Accommodation	17(4.6)	125(33.9)	206 (55.8)	21 (5.7)
Compromising	47(12.7)	110 (29.8)	193 (52.3)	19 (5.1)
Collaboration	73 (19.8)	148(40.1)	141 (38.2)	7 (1.9)
Avoidance	84 (22.8)	174 (47.2)	105 (28.5)	6 (1.6)
Competition	116 (31.4)	139 (37.7)	5 (1.4)	5 (1.4)

Table 2: Conflict Management Techniques Applied in the Colleges of Education in Central Western Zone

Source: Field Data

Table 2 shows the conflict management techniques that are applied in the Colleges of Education in Central-Western zone. On the issue of accommodating other people as a conflict management technique, 17 (4.6%) of the respondents rarely used it, 125 (33.9%) occasionally used it, 206 (55.8%) regularly used it whereas 21 (5.7%) always used it. The finding indicates that more than half of the respondents used accommodation technique regularly. Using accommodation as a conflict management technique is aimed at maintaining a working relationship with others. This confirms Owens (2004) view that accommodation being typified by appeasement and that the motive behind the use of accommodation must be associated with the desire to maintain a working relationship with others even at some sacrifice of one's own interests.

With respect to the views about compromising as a conflict management technique, 19 (5.1%) of the respondents always used it, 193 (52.3%) regularly used it, 110 (29.8%) occasionally used it while 47 (12.7%) rarely used it. This indicates that almost half of the respondents used compromise as a conflict management technique. This, therefore, means that most of the respondents preferred to compromise, giving away a little, while taking a little from others. Respondents indicated that compromise as a conflict management is healthy coexistence with others in the Colleges of Education in the zone.

Out of 369 respondents, who expressed their views on the issue of collaborating as a conflict management technique, 7 (1.9%) always used it, 141 (38.2%) regularly used it, 148 (40.1%) occasionally use it, whereas 73 (19.8%) rarely used it in conflict situation. It can be inferred that a greater number of respondents used collaboration as a technique in conflict management.

In reaction to the issue of avoidance as a conflict management technique, 6 (1.6%) of the respondents always used it, 105 (28.5%) regularly used it, 174 (47.2%) occasionally used it, whereas 84 (22.8%) rarely used it. This implies that a greater number of the respondents did not see avoidance as a very effective means of conflict management. Respondents indicated that issues normally avoided or ignored rear their heads at another time in a situation, which leaves both parties, rather embarrassed.

Finally, on the issue of whether competition is an effective conflict management technique, only 5 (1.4%) respondents always used it, 109 (29.5%) regularly used it, 139 (37.7%) occasionally used it, while 116 (31.4%) rarely used it. The inference that one can draw from the analysis is that, respondents did not use competition as an effective tool for conflict management in the Colleges of Education in the zone. From the analysis so far, the answer to research question three shows that the conflict management techniques mostly used by respondents were accommodation, compromising and collaborating. Whether other ways could be used to prevent conflicts in the Colleges of Education among students during sports competition, I received varied responses. One hundred and eighty-two (49.3%) respondents were of the view that conflict management and prevention should be made a compulsory course for all programmes in the first year for all students, and in this way, students will have insight of what to expect in the colleges in all areas of life. Other suggestions are as follows;

- Other non-competitive programmes should be organized in the zone to bring students together frequently to fraternize
- Friendly games should be organized once in a semester among the colleges in the zone
- Talks should be organized on how to coexist as students
- Awards should be instituted for most disciplined college(s).

5. Conclusions

This study sought to assess the causes of conflict among students during sports competition and how these conflict situations are managed.

From the findings, it can be concluded that conflict at all levels existed among students in the Colleges of Education in Central-western zone and the various causes of conflicts identified were; contradictory information (students not sure of what to believe), the feeling of superiority of some students over others, spreading unkind gossip about each other, differences in perception of issues, when changes occur abruptly and unpredictably and desire to win a competition at all cost. Moreover, the prevention and management strategies employed in the zone were; accommodation, compromise, collaborating, avoiding and competition.

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