Challenges Facing Conflict Management in Public Secondary Schools in Matete Sub-County, Kakamega County, Kenya

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Abstract:
Conflict connotes negative impact as is viewed in war, destruction, aggression, violence, and competition. Human beings interact with each other for their mutual give and take and as such come in conflict with one another. Evidences about interpersonal conflict show that it can be seen in the working relationship of the school principal and his subordinates, colleagues and even the community at large. The main objective of the study was to investigate the challenges facing conflict management in public secondary schools of Matete Sub- County, Kakamega County in Kenya. The specific objectives of the study were to establish conflict awareness challenges, examine the conflict management challenges and evaluate the role of the environment in conflict management in public secondary schools in Matete Sub-County. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design; the target population for the study was 170 participants, which included Principals, the Heads of Departments and the Bursars in public secondary schools in Matete Sub-county. The study used stratified random sampling and simple random sampling techniques to select the samples. Both open ended and closed ended questionnaires were used to collect data. Piloting was done to validate instruments. Reliability was ascertained using split halves method. Thematic data analysis and interpretation of the research findings were done to summarize, interpret data and communicate the results in a meaningful way. Statistical tools like percentages, pie charts and bar graphs were used to present the findings. In conclusion, the study established that conflict prevalence in schools was due to personality clash, poor leadership as well as communication breakdown. Dialogue was identified as the best way to deal with conflict challenges in schools.

1. Introduction

Conflict may be defined as the natural tension that arises from differences between people (Gilman, 2002). Thus conflict exists whenever people are in disagreement and opposition (Lussier, 2000). Consequently, organizational conflict is costly, consuming 20 percent of a manager's time, and unresolved conflict can result in antisocial behaviour, covert retaliation, and violence (Meyer, 2004). In fact, Meyer cites previous research that found that heated conflicts can result in absenteeism in organizations. They increase personnel turnover and result in other inefficiencies. The ability to think clearly is reduced as tensions rise during workplace conflicts, further negatively affecting productivity. According to Robbins (2000), conflict does not appear out of thin air instead it has causes. These causes can be managed consciously and unconsciously, that is, positively and negatively. For example one of the causes of conflict is objective interference. This is so because in many situations, the achievement of one's person objective blocks the achievement of another's objectives. Both people may attain it. Suppose for instance, a new office becomes available. Two HODs may want the office, but it can only be allocated to one. Personal differences may also cause conflict. Indeed, conflicts can evolve out of –the individual who idolizes personal value systems. This is so because the chemistry between some people makes it hard for them to work together. Factors such as background, education, experience, exposure and training mould each individual into a unique personality with a particular set of values. The result is people may be perceived by others as abrasive, untrustworthy, strange or difficult to work with. Such personal differences can be a real and serious source of conflict Robbins, (2000).According to Rakhim (2010), the underlying causes of conflict depends on the way a society is organized for this can create both the root causes of conflict and the conditions in which its likely to occur. Any society which is organized so that some people are treated unequally and unjustly is likely to erupt into conflict. Conflicts in an organization arise when people are competing for the same resources (such as territory, jobs, income and housing) when they aren't fairly distributed or when there aren't enough to go round. The same applies to natural

resources (Kristner et al, 2001). This is especially likely if its leaders do not represent all the members of that society. It then follows that if an unequal society is reformed then conflicts will be rare. In the same vein when people create a society that does not see difference and diversity as problems, but as valuable for social growth, many causes of conflict disappear.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

In the Kenyan education system, various legislations serve as guidelines for management and administration of educational institutions (Education Act, 2012). However, it appears that most educational institutions have been less successful in management of conflicts MOE (2002). The Ministry of Education (2002) report indicated that in spite of the government policies put in place, Kenyan educational institutions have continued to report increased cases of conflict. Incidentally, most of these conflicts occurred in secondary schools. Many of the conflicts were characterized by violence and wanton destruction of institutional property. Between 1980 and 2008, the number of conflicts in public secondary schools alone increased from 22 (0.9%) to 300 (7.5%) (MOEST, 2008).School principals have perhaps never faced more challenges within the public education than they do today. Increased violence in schools has created a situation where providing security for students takes precedence to learning. Drug use among students and domestic violence place teachers and administration in a social services role, rather than focused on education, (Sybouts & Wendell, 1994, 19). The principal is thus faced with such huge task of resolving conflicts instead of concentrating his energy on improving the performance of his school. This study, therefore seeks to examine challenges faced by the school principals in the management of conflicts in public secondary schools in Matete Sub County and give possible solutions to the challenges faced in conflict management.

1.2. General Objective

The main objective of the study was to establish the challenges faced in conflict management by principals in public secondary schools in Matete Sub-County of Kakamega County, Kenya.

1.3. Specific Objectives

    i.   To establish conflict awareness challenges in public secondary schools of Matete Sub-County.
   ii.   To examine conflict management challenges in public secondary schools of Matete Sub-County.
  iii.   To establish environmental challenges in conflict management in public secondary schools of Matete Sub-County.

1.4. Justification

The study was to enable the government to come up with better policies for conflict management in public secondary schools. Additionally, the study was of great use to Principals running secondary schools and other managers of institutions where conflict is bound to arise. This is borne out of the realization that research in conflict management in public secondary schools is inadequate given the changing trends in education and the culture of the current generation. Kenya has also been slow in generating knowledge and taking advantage of, new and emerging innovations in the field of conflict management. This research will therefore contribute to knowledge in conflict management in secondary schools. Research findings would be used for proper planning and discovery of new approaches to conflict management in public secondary schools. Findings of most researchers conducted are not disseminated for use due to lack of coordination and centralized research system to handle them.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

This chapter was to examine the theoretical framework, theories related to the topic, critique of relevant literature, conceptual framework, variables, gaps and summary.

2.2. Theoretical Framework

2.2.1. Social Conflict Theory

Karl Marx is the father of the social conflict theory, which is a component of the 4 paradigms of sociology. Certain conflict theories set out to highlight the ideological aspects inherent in traditional thought. Whilst many of these perspectives hold parallels, conflict theory does not refer to a unified school of thought and should not be confused with, for instance, peace and conflict studies, or any other specific theory of social conflict. Baird et al (2008), argues that of the classical founders of social science, conflict theory is most commonly associated with Karl Marx (1818–1883). Based on a dialectical materialist account of history, Marxism posited that capitalism, like previous socio economic systems, would inevitably produce internal tensions leading to its own destruction. Marx ushered in radical change, advocating proletarian revolution and freedom from the ruling classes. At the same time, Karl Marx was aware that most of the people living in capitalist societies did not see how the system shaped the entire operation of society. Just like how we see private property, or the right to pass that property on to our children as natural, many members in capitalistic societies see the rich as having earned their wealth through hard work and education, while seeing the poor as lacking in skill and initiative. Marx rejected this type of thinking and termed it false consciousness, explanations of social problems as the shortcomings of individuals rather than the flaws of society. Marx wanted to replace this kind of thinking with something Engels termed class consciousness, workers' recognition of themselves as a class unified in opposition to capitalist and ultimately to the capitalist system itself. In general,

Marx wanted the proletarians to rise up against the capitalist and overthrow the capitalist system, Macaronis (2011).

2.2.2. Modern Conflict Theory

C. Wright Mills has been called the founder of modern conflict theory. In Mills' view, social structures are created through conflict between people with differing interests and resources. Individuals and resources, in turn, are influenced by these structures and by the "unequal distribution of power and resources in the society." (Knapp, 1994). The power elite of American society, (i.e., the military-industrial complex) had "emerged from the fusion of the corporate elite, the Pentagon, and the executive branch of government." Mills argued that the interests of these elite were opposed to those of the people. He theorized that the policies of the power elite would result in "increased escalation of conflict, production of weapons of mass destruction, and possibly the annihilation of the human race." (Knapp, 1994).On the other hand, according to Sears (2008), societies are defined by inequality that produces conflict, rather than which produces order and consensus. This conflict based on inequality can only be overcome through a fundamental transformation of the existing relations in the society, and is productive of new social relations. He posits that the disadvantaged have structural interests that run counter to the status quo, which, once they are assumed, will lead to social change. Thus, they are viewed as agents of change rather than objects one should feel sympathy for. He argues further that human potential (e.g., capacity for creativity) is suppressed by conditions of exploitation and oppression, which are necessary in any society with an unequal division of labour. These and other qualities do not necessarily have to be stunted due to the requirements of the so-called "civilizing process," or "functional necessity": creativity is actually an engine for economic development and change.

2.2.3. The Dual Concern Model

The dual concern model of conflict resolution is a conceptual perspective that assumes individuals' preferred method of dealing with conflict is based on two underlying themes or dimensions: concern for self (assertiveness) and concern for others (empathy). It identifies five conflict resolution strategies that individuals may be depending on their disposition towards self or prosocial goals. These are: Avoidance conflict style. This is characterized by joking, changing or avoiding the topic, or even denying that a problem exists. The conflict avoidance style is used when an individual has no interest in dealing with the other party, when one is uncomfortable with conflict, or due to cultural contexts. Avoidance is a decision to do nothing when confronted with a conflict. It assumes that once ignored the situation may resolve itself. Truter posits that this is not a successful method of conflict resolution because in the long run the conflict remains unresolved. Truter, (2003).

In contrast, yielding or "accommodating" conflict styles are characterized by a high level of concern for others and a low level of concern for oneself. This passive pro-social approach emerges when individuals derive personal satisfaction from meeting the needs of others and have a general concern for maintaining stable, positive social relationships. When faced with conflict, individuals with a yielding conflict style tend to give into others' demands out of respect for the social relationship. This approach differs with the fairly aggressive competing style. The competitive or "fighting" conflict style maximizes individual assertiveness (i.e., concern for self) and minimizes empathy (i.e., concern for others). Groups consisting of competitive members generally enjoy seeking domination over others, and typically see conflict as a "win or lose" predicament. Fighters tend to force others to accept their personal views by employing competitive power tactics (arguments, insults, accusations, violence, etc.) that foster feelings of intimidation (Morrill, 1995).

Cooperation conflict style is characterized by an active concern for both pro-social and pro-self behaviour; the cooperation conflict style is typically used when an individual has elevated interests in their own outcomes as well as in the outcomes of others. During conflict, cooperators collaborate with others in an effort to find an amicable solution that satisfies all parties involved in the conflict. Individuals using this type of conflict style tend to be both highly assertive and highly empathetic. By seeing conflict as a creative opportunity, collaborators willingly invest time and resources into finding a "win-win" solution. According to the literature on conflict resolution, a cooperative conflict resolution style is recommended above all others. Collaborating style envisages a situation where there is an attempt at mutual understanding. On the other hand compromise approach attempts to solve conflict by involving the competing parties in bargaining. Thus, each party is bound to win and lose on some front. The conciliation or "compromising" conflict style is typical of individuals who possess an intermediate level of concern for both personal and others' outcomes. Compromisers value fairness and, in doing so, anticipate mutual give-and-take interactions. This conflict style can be considered an extension of both "yielding" and "cooperative" strategies. (Bartol and Martin 1991). To a large extent, this model informs my study for it posits conflict management styles that I have used in the study.

3. Research Methodology

The study was to use a descriptive survey research design. This study used the descriptive research design which was used to describe people's responses to questions about a phenomenon or situation with the aim of understanding the respondent's perception from which truism is constructed This is based on the constructivist epistemology which holds that reality is what the respondents generally perceive it to be. In descriptive research design, information on the description of a situation, phenomenon or variable are obtained and these views are taken to represent those of the entire population. According to Brown, et al (2003), research design provides the glue that holds the research project together. A design is used to structure the research, to show how all of the major parts of the project, which include the samples or groups, measures, treatments or programs and methods of assignment that work together to try to address the central research questions. For purposes of this study, a descriptive survey was used. The method was selected as it permitted gathering of data from respondents in natural settings. Creswell (2003) suggests that exploratory studies merit when not

much has been written about the topic under study or population being studied. The study enables a researcher to obtain information and descries existing phenomena by asking individuals about their perceptions, attitudes, behaviour and values. Surveys can be used for explaining or exploring the existing status of two or more variables at a given point in time. Descriptive survey design describes the characteristics on behaviour of a particular population in a systematic and accurate fashion (Kothari 2007). In this research our target population was 170. This included all the 17 Principals, all the 136 Heads of Departments and all the 17 school bursars of all the public secondary schools in Matete Sub-County, Kakamega County, Kenya. This population was a representative of all the school teaching, non-teaching and subordinate staffs who are all involved in managing conflicts in schools.

4. Research Findings and Discussion

4.1. Response Rate
A total of 96 respondents out of the 102 returned their filled questionnaires. The study established and analyzed data from 16 Principals, 65 HODs and 15 Bursars as a representative sample.

No.	Category	Population	Response rate
1	Principal	17	16
2	HODs	68	65
3	Bursars	17	15
	Total	**102**	**96**

Table 1 : Response rate

4.2. Causes of Conflicts in Schools
The findings show that most conflicts in schools 29 % (26 respondents) are caused by poor communication and leadership , 8 % (8 respondents) indicated that conflicts in schools is caused by resource challenges and 63 % (62 respondents) indicated that conflicts in schools is caused by personality clash as summarized in the table 4.

. Cause	Number	% of respondents
Poor communication and leadership	26	29
Resource challenges	8	8
Personality clash	62	63
TOTAL	**96**	**100**

Table 2: Causes of conflicts in schools
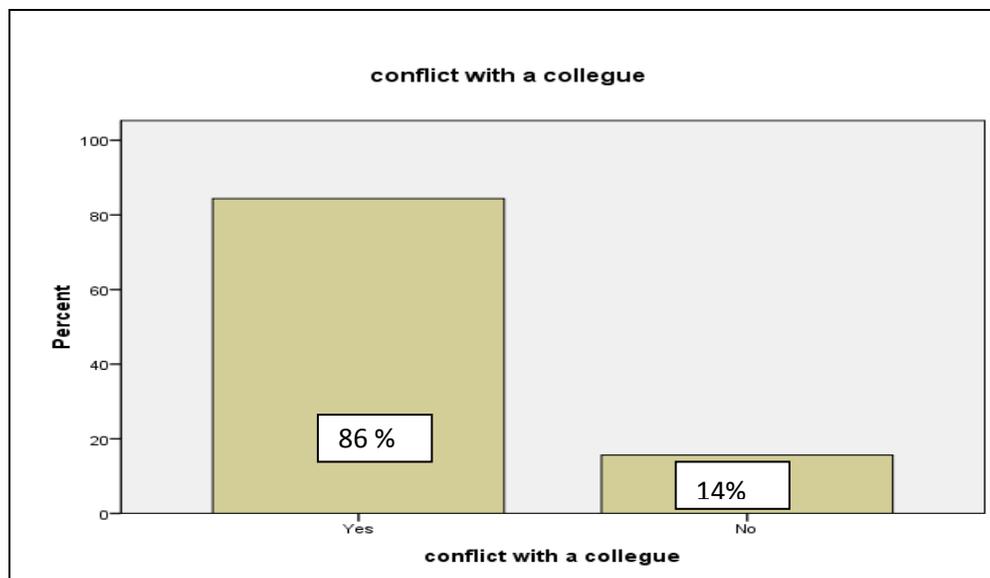
4.3. Conflict with Colleague

Figure 1: conflicts in work place

The study also indicated that a total of 81 (86 %) out of 96 respondents had conflicts with a colleague while 15 (14 %) of the respondents did not have conflict with a colleague as shown in figure 1

4.4. Conflict and Performance
From the study, 87% (84 respondents) of the respondents felt that conflict affects performance while 13% (12 respondents) of the respondents felt that conflict does not affect performance. 97% (94 respondents) of the respondents felt that educators need to be trained in conflict management. While 3% (2 respondents) of the respondents felt that educators need not be trained in conflict management.

	Conflict affects performance		Educators need to be trained in conflict management	
	No.	% respondents	No.	% respondents
YES	84	87	94	97
NO	12	13	2	3
Total	96	100	96	100

Table 3: Causes of conflicts

4.5. Conflict Management Challenges in Public Secondary Schools
In line with objective two, respondents were to give responses as to how they deal with challenges that come with conflict management.

Handling conflicts	Number	% of respondents
Via dialogue / forgiving and moving on	60	63
Reporting to my boss who will handle it	21	22
Not applicable	15	15
TOTAL	**96**	**100**

Table 4: Conflict management technique

	Conflict Management Methods	1 %	2 %	3 %	4 %	5 %	MEAN	SD
1.	Involve all stake holders in managing conflict	33	42	18	5	2	2.01000	0.88990
2	Communicates well with his subordinates	42	45	9	3	1	1.76000	0.66240
3	Does not take sides in a conflict	8	14	21	42	15	3.42000	1.30360
4	Looks for a fair solution in a conflict situation	26	49	21	2	2	2.05000	0.72750
5	Acts as a mediator	39	42	14	4	1	1.86000	0.76040
6	Uses conflict management skills in finding a solution	27	54	14	2	3	2.00000	0.76000
7	Strives for good interpersonal relationship with staff	51	36	8	3	2	1.69000	0.79390
8	Is proactive in managing or handling conflicts	30	52	14	4	0	1.92000	0.59360
9	Strives for a win-win situation in conflict management	25	45	23	4	3	2.15000	0.88750

Table 5: Conflict Management Methods
Key: 1.Strongly Agree   2. Agree   3.Neutral   4. Disagree 5. Strongly Disagree

From Table 5, it was found out that the principal involves all stake holders in managing conflict in school (M=2.0 and SD=0.9).

5. Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1. Summary

5.1.1. Conflict Awareness Challenges
The first objective aimed at establishing conflict awareness challenges in public secondary schools of Matete Sub-County. The analysis indicated that 84.0% (81 respondents) of the respondents felt that conflict in working places is unavoidable while 16 % (19respondents) felt that conflict in working places is avoidable. The findings show that most conflicts in schools 29 % (26 respondents) are caused by poor communication and leadership , 8 % (8 respondents) indicated that conflicts in schools is caused by resource challenges and 63 % (62 respondents) indicated that conflicts in schools is caused by personality clash. The study also indicated that a total of 81 (86 %) out of 96 respondents had conflicts with a colleague while 15 (14 %) of the respondents did not have conflict with a colleague. From the study 87% (84 respondents) of the respondents felt that conflict affects performance while 13% (12 respondents) of the respondents felt that conflict does not affect performance. 97% (94 respondents) of the respondents felt that educators need to be trained in conflict management. While 3% (2 respondents) of the respondents felt that educators need not be trained in conflict management.

5.1.2. Conflict Management Challenges

The second objective was to establish conflict management challenges in public secondary schools of Matete Sub County. The study indicates that most respondents dealt with conflict via dialogue while 14 % of the respondents dealt with conflict through clear job description and open communication channels. Majority of the respondents' strongly agreed that Principals determine the smooth running of the school and that their Principal managed the school well , the Principal also strongly encouraged teachers in their work. The findings showed that respondents strongly agree that their Principals lead and manage by example in conflict situations and communicates well with the learners and the teachers. From this study, it was revealed that most Principals encourage teaching and learning and ensure that work load is shared among all people equitably to avoid conflicts. Average score for the respondents on Principals management on conflicts indicate that Principals addresses problems positively while a majority of Principals strongly empower school management teams to manage. The results also show that 67% (70 respondents) felt that regular briefs , meetings , dialogue and open forums (29 respondents) felt that being neutral arbiters and accommodate different views are best practices in handling conflicts in schools .

5.1.3. Role of Environment in Conflict Management

The research conducted showed that the environment plays an important role in conflict management. It was found out that most of the principals have skills in managing conflict at 69%. Respondents also felt that those Principals who did not have skills, (20 %) do not have conflict management skills and have not attended any conflict management courses while 11% (11 respondents) simply are indecisive and not up to date. The study shows that respondents agreed on the importance of organizing workshops on conflict management by Principals (97 %). 45 % of the Principals do not equip teachers with conflict management skills. The findings indicate that organizing workshops on conflict management is very important (82%). 52 % of the respondents felt that Principals can equip teachers with conflict management skills by sending them to workshops. It was also found that some of the Principals are the source of conflict at 33 % due to mostly incompetence and poor management skills. Most respondents felt that conflict can be dealt with by Principals when stakeholders are involved whenever need arises. The study also showed that organizing frequent meetings and workshops can go a long way in forestalling conflict in schools. 39 % (37 respondents) of the respondents stated that lack of co-operation from all parties is another challenge facing conflict management conflicts in schools.

5.2. Conclusion

The following conclusions were made based on the findings

i. The analysis indicated that conflict in working places is unavoidable. Most conflicts in schools are caused by poor communication, poor leadership, resource challenges and personality clash. Conflict affects performance and there is need for training in conflict management.
ii. Most respondents dealt with conflict via dialogue. Principals determine the smooth running of the school and that their Principal managed the school well they lead and manage by example in conflict situations, ensure that work load is shared among all people equitably to avoid conflicts. Regular briefs , meetings , dialogue and open forums reduce conflicts
iii. Most of the principals have skills in managing conflict but most do not equip teachers with conflict management skills. Workshops are very important in conflict. Some of the Principals are the source of conflict at due to mostly incompetence and poor management skills.

5.3. Recommendations

The following recommendations were made based on the findings of the study:

i. The school administration should try to find out the root cause of conflicts in public secondary schools and involve all the education stakeholders in the school in order to enhance discipline for effective conflict management strategies to be put in place.
ii. Most conflicts are dealt with through dialogue, clear job description and open communication channels.
iii. The school administration should involve more staff in conflict management methods in public secondary schools and also rope in key societal stakeholders whenever issues arise.
iv. There is need to have training and workshops on conflict resolution techniques in schools to assist in management of conflicts.

5.4. Suggestions for Further Research

The following recommendations are made for further research following the findings of this study:

i. A similar study need to be undertaken in private secondary schools to allow for generalizations of the study findings. "Challenges facing conflict management in private secondary schools "
ii. How perceptions affects effective achievement of conflict management in organizations.
iii. Evaluate various techniques used by the CEOs in conflict resolution and the performance of organizations.

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