

MEDIATION AS CONFLICT RESOLUTION STRATEGY AND COMPANY WORKERS' PRODUCTIVITY IN CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA

Ushie, Godwin B. Ph.D
Ukpanukpong, Fidelis A.
Arikpo, Esther Bassey Ph.D
Ekpenyong Violet Oyo (Ph.D)

Department of Continuing Education and Development Studies,
Faculty of Education
University of Calabar, Calabar
godwinushie101@gmail.com

&

Mrs. Igbo Regina Andokie
Department of Adult and Non-formal Education,
Federal College of Education, Obudu



Abstract

This study investigated the influence of mediation strategy as an instrument of conflict resolution on company workers' productivity in selected manufacturing companies in Cross River State, Nigeria. To achieve the purpose of this study, one null hypothesis was formulated to direct the study. Ex-post facto research design was adopted. A sample of 499 respondents was randomly selected from nineteen manufacturing companies operating in the study area. A modified four-point Likert scale questionnaire consisting of two sections (A and B) constructed by the researchers was used for data collection. Section A contained items on conflict resolution strategy in terms of mediation, and section B contained items on workers' productivity. The data collected were analyzed using simple linear regression analysis and the hypothesis was tested at .05 probability level. The finding showed that mediation strategy significantly influence workers' productivity in companies under study. Based on the finding it was recommended among others that; workers at all levels should be trained and giving the right behavioural orientation so as to reduce the occurrence of conflict in workplace, there is also a need for training and retraining of managers on how to effectively manage conflict to enhance employees productivity.

Keywords: Mediation, conflict resolution, instrument, workers' productivity and manufacturing companies.



Introduction

Organization, be it public or private, small or large exists essentially to achieve certain economic, social or political objectives. These objectives may be in form of profit making, provision of services, production of goods and increase in sales turnover and so on. However, these objectives can only be achieved when human resources are employed to utilize other

resources such as raw materials, machineries, money and information (George & Jones in Ushie, 2019).

Uwa (2014) posited that, organizations are made up of different people with different attitude, beliefs, abilities and personality, therefore conflict is inevitable. There is no organization that can effectively carry out its day to day activities without encountering

some form of conflict. Therefore, conflict is the commonest, general and wide-spread phenomenon that is synonymous with group activity and interaction.

Conflict was viewed as a negative and undesirable aspect of organizational life in the early days of management research and theorizing. Hence, more attention was directed towards its avoidance (Use, 2013). But recently, it has been generally accepted that conflict is somewhat inevitable and is not always or necessarily bad for an organization. If properly managed, conflict can lead to the development of ideas, and can also create internal cohesiveness among groups. Therefore, the key for organizational success is to recognize and manage conflict effectively for the good of the organization, rather than to simply avoiding it. Some of the strategies used in managing conflict include forcing avoidance, mediation, structural changes, compromise and smoothing (Segal & Smith, 2013).

During conflict resolution in industrial relations system, when negotiations or collective bargaining process fails, parties often invite an independent mediator to try to facilitate settlement of the conflict. The mediator plays an active part in the process. He is knowledgeable in labour matters, acts as intermediary and suggests possible solution. Mediators act only in advisory capacity because they have no decision-making powers and cannot impose a settlement on the conflicting parties. They are expected to gain trust and confidence from the conflicting groups/individuals (Alabi, 2003). Thus, mediation is an often used approach by resident advisors, especially in resolving roommate conflicts. It can be a satisfying and fulfilling way to reach resolution on some very sticky matters. It can help the individuals involved become better communicators and be more prepared to handle conflict in the future.

According to Imhebeknai (2000), mediation is defined as a process in which individuals seek to talk through their differences with the help of neutral party and

reach a mutually-agreed upon resolution. The source noted that mediation can be superior to other conflict resolution methods because the individuals, or disputants, create their own solutions and consequently have more investment in the resolution. In his opinion, a true mediation allows each side to share their perspective, listen to the other perspective, engage in dialogue, respect the rights and thoughts of others, and brainstorm possible solutions before arriving at a resolution. He further maintained that mediation is a healthy way to share concerns and help people learn how to resolve conflict in a positive manner.

Fully (2005) viewed mediation as a process of increasing the chances that everyone will be pleased with the resolution. Thus, the more often you mediate, the better you will be as a mediator. He noted that mediation as a process can be extraordinarily helpful, but it must be adhered to and trusted in order to work properly. He further disclosed that, mediator can be most helpful in many roommate or community disputes. There are however, a number of circumstance in which mediation is not the proper solution. In instance where violence has occurred, or may occur, mediation is inappropriate because either the threatening atmosphere places one of the disputants at a disadvantage or a disputant enters the mediation with motives that are incompatible with the process. He concluded that mediation is one of the methods of conflict resolution through which organization resolve conflicts among members.

Funatu (2011) opined that resolving conflicts involves entrusting their traditional justice and conflict resolution on the principle of win-lose solution still unresponsive to the various conflicts known in the current society, mainly because of economic diversification and social relationships and the very fast rhythm of our present life. He noted that conflict resolution can be achieved through mediation, with great success in family conflicts, divorce, collective labour disputes,

inheritance, co-ownership, contracts, conflict between students, because employers, political parties or even countries, bringing a better response to the parties to the conflict by focusing on the interests at stake, as mediation aims at finding affordable and realistic solutions for both sides in the conflict in accordance with the law, unlike the traditional conflict resolution where the focus is mainly on the legal aspects of the case.

According to Madaline (2012) participation in the mediation process is voluntary, because mediation does not establish guilt or innocence of the conflicting parties. The mediators' role is not that of decision, but that of providing procedural information, stimulate the dialogue, facilitate change of views and information between parties, help the parties to clarify the needs and interests to overcome communication barriers and solve disagreements by finding mutually beneficial solutions. He notes that, during conflict resolution through mediation, the environment is based on the parties' trust in the mediator, where the person is able to facilitate negotiations between them and support them to resolve the conflict by obtaining a mutually agreed solution. He concludes that mediation is an efficient and sustainable optimal way of solving conflicts in a friendly way with a specialized third party as mediator in terms of neutrality, impartiality and confidentiality.

Kenny (2013) studied conflict resolution by mediation and organizational effectiveness in industries in Melbourne, Australia. Survey research design was adopted for the study. The entire population (census) of management staff in the study area was used as the study sample while clerical staff were used as the study respondents. Four research questions and hypotheses were used for the study with a 16-item questionnaire aimed at eliciting information from the respondents based on the mediation strategy of conflict resolution and organizational effectiveness.

The results obtained showed a significant relationship between mediation strategy of conflict resolution and organizational effectiveness. It was concluded

that conflict resolution through mediation improves organizational effectiveness generally. This study relates to the present study as it consists of the important indicators of conflict resolution that aid organizational effectiveness in industries. This implies that, the mode of conflict resolution via mediation strategy can lead to higher rate of organizational effectiveness in industries in the study area.

Fullan (2005) conducted a study on conflict resolution using mediation strategy and secondary school principals administrative effectiveness in New York. Ex-Post facto design was used for the study. Forty selected principals were used as the study sample with 200 teachers as study respondents. Three research questions and hypotheses were used in the study. A 12-item questionnaire was used to elicit information from the study respondents on the basis of conflict resolution using mediation strategy and administrative effectiveness of secondary school principals. Multiple regression analysis was used to analyze the generated data. The study revealed that mediation strategy of conflict resolution significantly influences the administrative effectiveness of principals in the study area, it was concluded that mediation strategy of conflict resolution is a product of principals' administrative effectiveness in schools. The research recommended among others that principals should adopt mediation strategy in conflict resolution so as to achieve the desired administrative effectiveness in terms of performance generally.

Yange (2015) studied mediation as a method of resolving conflict without going to court among organizational personnel in a textile industry in Kaduna State, Nigeria. A population of 2060 staff was used via purposive technique of sampling. Interviews were granted to the respondents with a 15-item questionnaire aimed at eliciting information on the mediation method of conflict resolution. Simple percentages were used as descriptive statistics for the study. The results obtained revealed that mediation strategy of conflict resolution significantly impacts on the effectiveness of organizational personnel without going to court. This implies that

mediation strategy of conflict resolution calls for desired results in mediation via durable peace between the parties involved.

Ushie and Ekpenyong (2019) conducted a study on collective bargaining as an instrument of conflict management and workers: productivity in manufacturing companies in Cross River State, Nigeria. Ex-post facto design was used for the study. A sample of 504 respondents was randomly selected from nineteen manufacturing companies operating in the study area. A modified four point likert type questionnaire was used for data collection. The data collected were analyzed using simple linear regression analysis and the results were tested at .05 probability level. The finding showed that collective bargaining significantly influence workers productivity in companies under study. The study is related to the present study, since both seeks a way(s) of improving company workers, productivity in Cross River State, Nigeria.

Aei (2006) adopted a cross-sectional survey design in a study carried out to examine if improving employment relationship depends more on mediation self-efficacy or job autonomy. The study's population comprised all employees of a Dutch Telecom Company while purposive sampling technique was employed to select a sample of 294 respondents. Six hypotheses were tested in the study. Their test items were designed into a 29-item five point Likert-type questionnaire and used to collate data for the study. Amongst other evaluations, the study sought to enquire whether the correlation between mediation self-efficacy and integrative mediation was stronger than the relationship between job autonomy and integrative mediation.

On completion of the data collection procedure, 136(46.3% return rate) copies of the questionnaire were deemed valid for data analysis and the collated data were analyzed using Pearson product moment correlation. The result revealed that an individual's mediation self-efficacy levels have stronger relationships with his/her capacity to bargain than the relationship between an individual's skill

variety levels and his/her capacity to bargain. The researcher then submitted that it is better for a mediating team to have individuals who have high level of job autonomy. The above reviewed study, though carried out in Holland (a European country), found relevance to the present study on the premise that, among other assessments, it sought to find out which skills are required by individuals who would be used to form a mediation team.

The researchers are of the view that if appropriate resolution strategy (mediation) is employed, they could be improved productivity in work organization. Productivity shows whether the activity of an organization is efficient and effective. Though the terms like productivity, ' efficiency and effectiveness are used together and practitioners sometimes alternate their meanings, however we must not identify productivity with efficiency and effectiveness. Productivity requires both efficiency and effectiveness, because a certain activity will not be productive if it is only efficient, but not effective. Productivity in economic sense may be defined as the relation between output and input. Input elements in an organization consists of resources used in the process of production of goods and services such as labour, materials, energy. Output consists of a given product, service and the amount of both (Savain, 2002).

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of mediation as conflict resolution strategy on company workers' productivity in Cross River State.

Research question

The following research question was posed to guide the study.

To what extent does conflict resolution through mediation influence company workers' productivity in Cross River State?

Research hypothesis

There is no significant influence of mediation on company workers' productivity in Cross River State.

Methodology

The study adopted the ex-post facto design because the researchers do not have direct control of the independent variables because their manifestation had already occurred or because they are inherently not manipulate-able. The population of the study comprised 2,522 workers in the 19 manufacturing companies in the study area. This represents

20% of each of the company's population. A modified four point Likert scale questionnaire consisting of two sections was design to elicit information. Section A contained items on conflict resolution strategy in terms of mediation and section B contained items on workers' productivity whose responses were highly satisfied, satisfied, dissatisfied and highly dissatisfied.

Results

The result of the study is presented in table 1 below as follows:

Table 1: Simple linear regression result of the influence of mediation strategy on company workers' productivity in Cross River State

Source of variance	Sum of square	Df	Mean square	F-ratio	P-value
Regression	909.783	1	909.78	13.05	.000
Residual	30737.382	497	69.70		
Total	31647.165	498			

$R=.170$; $R^2 = .029$; $\eta^2 = .170$

The result presented in Table 1 shows that the coefficient of regression R of .170 is an indication that there is a positive relationship between mediation strategy in conflict resolution and company workers' productivity in Cross River State. This implies that the more the use of mediation between workers and the management of the company during conflict resolution, the better the company workers' productivity in the state.

The regression model also produced an R^2 of .029. This indicates that the mediation accounted for 2.9% of the determinants of company workers' productivity of companies in the state. This finding is a critical indication that the mediation has low influence on the company workers' productivity in the state. The F-ratio from the Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) obtained from the regression table gives $F=13.05$ to 2 decimal places and the P-value of .000 (or $P<.05$) at the degree of freedom (df) 1 and 497. The implication of this result is that the null hypothesis is rejected and the finding drawn from the result is that there is significant influence of the mediation on the company workers' productivity in Cross River

State. This implies that the low level of the company workers' productivity in the state is accounted for significantly by poor mediation in conflict resolution between companies' management and their workers.

Discussion

The result of this study showed that there was a significant influence of the mediation strategy on the company workers' productivity in Cross River State. This implies that the low level of the company workers' productivity in the state is accounted for significantly by poor mediation in conflict resolution between company's management and their workers.

The best way to achieve sustainable results in conflict resolution through mediation is the dialogue between the parties, which implies their willingness to get together on a common solution according to a realistic approach that would remove existing prejudices and preconceived ideas, based on authentic values making it relevant to the expectations of the parties. It was noted that the conflict management process, allowing prevention or resolutions of a conflict due to third person's intervention being impartial and

with no decision power but guarantee communication between, partners and thus helps to restore the social bond.

The finding of this research was in line with Yonge (2015) who studied mediation as a method of resolving conflict without going to justice among organizational personnel in a textile industry. The results obtained revealed that mediation strategy of conflict resolution significantly impact on the effectiveness of organizational personnel without going to justice. The finding of the study was supported by Kenny (2013) study on conflict resolution by mediation and organizational effectiveness in industries. The results obtained showed a significant relationship between mediation strategy of conflict resolution and organizational effectiveness generally.

The finding of this study was in line with Fullan (2005) who conducted a study on conflict resolution using mediation strategy and secondary school principals' administrative effectiveness in New York using ex-post facto design. Forty selected principals were used as the study sample with 200 teachers as study respondents. The study revealed that mediation strategy of conflict resolution significantly influences the administrative effectiveness of principals in the study area.

Alibi (2003) in his view, sees mediation as a conflict resolution strategy in organizations in which the work style of mediation depends not only on the parties behaviour and personality, but also on the mediator's skills to facilitate communication and above all, on how he knows what actually happened. Knowing the cause is likely to facilitate the proper conduct of both mediation and the positive results which lead to final peace agreement.

Conclusion

The study's finding revealed that mediation strategy of conflict resolution significantly influence company workers' productivity in Cross River State. Though, productivity in

companies in Cross River State is relatively low due to conflict between employers and employees over matters and conditions of employment. It is on this premise that the researchers have a strong view that if conflict resolution through mediation is employed, they could be positive influence on company workers' productivity in the state.

Recommendations

Based on the finding of the study, the following recommendations were made:

- i. Since the mediator should not impose a solution on parties in conflict, he should serve only the legitimate interests and objectives of the parties,
- ii. Workers at all level should be trained and giving the right behavioural orientation as to reduce the occurrence of conflict at workplace,
- iii. There is a need for training and retraining of managers on how to effectively manage conflict to enhance employees' productivity,
- iv. Organizations be it private or public, small or big should formulate and execute policies, programmes, rules and actions that are legal and employees based.

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