PSYCHOLOGICAL MANIFESTED CONFLICTS AND GENDER INFLUENCE OF SECONDARY SCHOOLS PRINCIPALS ON MANAGEMENT OPTIONS IN RIVERS STATE

By

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Abstract
Conflict is disagreement between and within individuals and groups. It is a force that can affect growth in an organization. Although conflict is a natural phenomenon when it occurs should be managed to the benefit of the organization. Therefore, this work is titled psychological conflict manifestations and management options of secondary schools principals in Rivers State, Nigeria. To guide the study two research questions and two hypotheses were formulated. The population of the study was 245 public senior secondary school principals in Rivers State. The researcher designed a “psychological conflict manifestation and management option questionnaire” (pcmoq) which was used for data collection. The mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions while the t-test tested at 0.5 level of significance was used to respond to the null hypotheses. Findings revealed that there are psychological manifested conflicts in secondary schools in Rivers State of Nigeria; that gender does not influence use of conflict management options, yet, there is a significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female principals on how gender Influence use conflict management options. Suggestions were made and conclusion drawn.

Throughout the history of man, there has existed issues of disagreement which emanate from the gathering of individuals in organizations. Leaders in organizations strive daily to meet the aims and aspirations of members of the organizations in order to help meet prescribed and general organizational goals. Unfortunately, most times, organizations run short of meeting the general goal set by the organization due to conflicts. Conflict is the opposition of ideas, principles and values which try to balance power between the leaders and the led and even amongst staff. Conflict is a strong force
that can make or mar achievement of set goals. Conflict can improve realization of organization goals if well managed but can be detrimental, fatal and agonizing to the organization when not properly managed. The components of conflict are many and include values, norms and classes which play roles in conflict situations. Conflict is more observable and potentially noticed in formal bureaucracy, than in the less formal ones. Burleson (2003) stated that conflict is a mutual interference of past and present actions and reactions in the system that lead to disruption of activities planned toward goal achievement, unhealthy relationship, violence, litigations and destruction of lives and property.

According to Rummel (1997) conflicts consist of levels of potentialities, dispositions and manifestations. As a potentiality, it means that conflict is capable of occurring in every organization; as a disposition, it has several or divers ways of occurrence which may be due to oppositions of powers and the balancing of powers; as a manifestation, it means that conflict is capable of appearing in different dimensions and situations. The concept of conflict manifestations has the view that people generally have different ideas and beliefs about conflict, while some think that age and experience are signs of maturity hence conflict is unlikely to occur amongst them, to such persons maturity is a tool to good government since the newly employed have a lot of expectations. Others state that as human faces differ so do their personalities, temperament, cultural background, educational qualification and personal psychology differ. Yet, others conceive conflict manifestations as natural phenomena which mean that conflict is synonymous with human beings and it is part of existence. These classes of people see conflict manifestation as ugly, bad or good.

Griffin (1990) disclosed that conflict can manifest through group interdependence, differences in goals, resources competition and interpersonal dynamics. Group interdependence he stated consists of pooled, sequential and reciprocal forms of conflict which may be characterized by undue and unnecessary delays in decision or implementation of decisions. Differences in goals are manifested through incompatible goals of members of the organization who may want to move things faster than expected. Conflicts that are induced by resource competition may arise because of limited nature of resources and that of interpersonal dynamics is closely related to personality clash of interest. Finally, conflict may manifest from activities of members of the organization, leadership problem and personal chemistry. Others may be due to disobedient to rules, fixation, withdrawal and Neanderthal tendencies which are portrayed by feeling of nonchalant attitude. These may be categorized into psychological, philosophical, social and cultural manifested conflicts.

Psychologically manifested conflict occurs through acts of aggression, temperaments, state of the mind and thought as well as people’s needs. Psychological
conflict may occur due to administrator’s decision making when several options are attractive or when no option is attractive, it may stem from behavior dispositions or patterns, or even the tendency to behave in a particular way. Psychological conflicts can occur still from individual’s expectations or the predictions of the outcomes of behavioural possibilities, amongst others. Akpan (2001) and Okon (2008) in their various studies found out that conflict manifest in secondary schools in Akwa Ibom state and were influenced by gender dispositions which also affected use or choice of conflict management options.

Rummel (1997), Okon (2008), Su’udy (2009) and Akpan (2011) have suggested that an individual’s conflict management style is a behavioural orientation of how to approach or handle conflict, with individuals choosing a pattern of principles to guide them through conflict process. Conflict management styles or options have been measured by a variety of classification. Follet, (1940); Dutch, (1949) and Blake and Mouton, (1964) in Desrayaud (2008) have classified conflict management into several ways and dimensions such as problem solving, win/win and lose/lose styles, withdrawing, compromise, forcing, obliging and smoothing, as well as dominating and integrating options but this study concentrated on the views of Thomas and Kilman (1976) who classified conflict management options into five, namely competition, accommodation, collaboration, avoidance and compromise.

Accommodation conflict management option relates to being cooperative on behalf of other party in conflict but not being assertive about one’s own interest. The leader who uses the accommodation option seeks to satisfy other’s interest than his. This style encourages cooperation even at the detriment of personal interest. The avoidance option is otherwise called withdrawing style and involves a passive refusal to identify the source of the problem. Bateman and Snell (2002) stated that leaders who use the avoidance option do nothing to satisfy themselves or others since such leaders either ignore the problem by doing nothing at all or address the issue by merely smoothing over or deemphasize the disagreement.

The competition option is also known as forcing or dominating style. Kritner and Kinicki (2001) indicated that leaders who use the competition management option ignore others’ needs and satisfy their interest. They use dominating tactic when an unpopular solution must be implemented, and when the issue at stake is minor or deadline is near. The collaboration option is characterized by high concern for one’s own group interest matched with a high concern for the interest of others. It is a mid way tactic where a win/win is desired. The collaboration management option is time consuming but seeks to satisfy the interest of every party in dispute. Finally, the compromise option is a give and take approach to conflict management. It involves a moderate concern for one’s group interest and less concern for others. This is a style
where leaders tend to win some in order to lose some, Bateman and Snell (2002) added that the compromise option involved moderate attention to both parties in the conflict. Therefore, school principals irrespective of gender may use any of the above discussed conflict management options in managing conflicts that occur in schools.

The term ‘gender’ Chhabra (2005) stated, began to be used in research in women’s studies in the 1970s and that the concept of female or male is largely social constructions and far from being solely a biologically given phenomena. While the concept relates to being biologically male or female, it should be accepted as a social phenomena delineated as masculine or famine. Chhabra (2005) maintained that when women are involved in peace negotiations and in structuring and grafting a peace agreement, they keep the future of their societies, and communities in mind. Comfortini (2006) indicated that drawing from nineteenth and early twentieth-century feminist tradition, some feminists in the 1970s and 1980s proposed that women were by nature, upbringing and by virtue of being mothers and caretakers, are morally superior to and more peaceful than men.

Dee (2010) indicated that gender differences exist in abilities and perceptions and to a large extent the choice they made in decisions. He further pointed out that abilities of highly capable women have rarely received serious recognition and support. Although there is increasing interest and participation, women in social, political and educational leadership positions are affected by many obstacles such as the feeling that women are weak and cannot bear risk, and that they are not capable of taking prompt decisions, which inhibit them from assessing their full potentials in organizational leadership.

Thomas, Thomas and Schaublut (2008) in their findings discovered that moderate effect size for both organizational level and gender with negligible interaction effect. The strongest gender finding was that men scored significantly higher on competition at all six organization levels. Thus, there is no evidence that conflict style of men and women converge at higher organizational levels. Su’udy (2009) exploring the effect of gender and collectivism/individualism on conflict management style among Indonesians and Americans discovered that both groups preferred the (avoidance) style and that American males were significantly more individualistic than American females, Indonesian males and Indonesian females.

Havenga (2013) in his study in South Africa about the relationship between gender/age, status differences and conflict management styles in small business found out that no significant difference could be found with regards to the different genders. Although a small effect size of 0.118 was experienced with the integrated dependant. The females make use of the integrated style on more frequent base than men in order
to manage conflict situations in business. Brewer, Mitchell, and Weber (2013) who worked on the relationship between biological sex, gender role, organizational status and management behaviour of male and females in three similar organizations from Flinder University in South Australia discovered that after controlling for biological sex, and when compared with other gender roles, masculine individuals were highest on dominating conflict style, whereas feminine individuals were highest on the avoiding style and androgynous individuals on the integrated style.

**Research Questions**

To achieve the purpose of this work two research questions were postulated.

**Hypotheses**

There is no significant difference in the means ratings of male and female principals on how psychological conflicts manifest in secondary schools in Rivers State in Nigeria. There is no significant difference in the means ratings of male and female principals on use of conflict management options.

**Methodology**

The study was a descriptive survey with a population of 245 principals the sample was drawn from public secondary schools; 240 questionnaires were collected: 91 female principals and 149 male principals. The instrument used for data collection was the questionnaire titled psychological conflicts and management options questionnaire” (PCMOQ). The questionnaire contained 10 items indicating likely psychological manifested conflicts in the secondary schools with the response pattern as “Always” “rarely” “seldom” and ‘never’. Principals in secondary schools were made to respond to the questionnaire by ticking in the space provided. The instrument was administered to the principals with the aid of two research assistants. Data collected were analyzed using the mean and standard deviation to respond to the research questions and t-test was used to test the hypotheses at 0.5 levels of significance.

**Findings**

**Research Question one**

How does psychological conflict manifest in secondary schools in Rivers State of Nigeria.
Table One: Psychological Manifested Conflicts in Secondary Schools in Rivers State

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>X</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Decision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Teachers flog disobedient students</td>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Students insult staff</td>
<td>2.47</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Students fight themselves</td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Staff abuse themselves</td>
<td>2.36</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Teachers are not happy about their poor salary</td>
<td>3.28</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Some of the staff are depressed because of domestic problems</td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Teachers complain when promises of increased salary is not met</td>
<td>3.34</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Teachers complain when they are not rewarded when they excel</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Teachers do not keep to school rules and regulations</td>
<td>2.43</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Some teachers complain of the low esteem of teachers.</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Grand mean</strong></td>
<td><strong>2.86</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.83</strong></td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 indicated that respondents agreed that questionnaire item 1, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 10 are sources of psychological conflicts in secondary schools in Rivers State. Since the recorded mean (x) points are above 2.50. Questionnaire items 2, 4, and 9 with mean points below 2.50 were not accepted as a way conflict manifests in secondary schools. The grand mean (x) was 2.86 which indicated that psychological conflicts manifests in secondary schools in Rivers State.

**Research Question Two**

How does principal’s gender influence use of conflict management options in secondary schools in Rivers State?

Table 2: Mean Ratings of Principals’ Influence of Gender on Conflict Management Options

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conflict Options</th>
<th>Management</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Decision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Competition</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2.22</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1.85</td>
<td>1.04 Rejected/Rejected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2.51</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2.45</td>
<td>1.00 Accepted/Rejected</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2 indicated that mean (x) ratings of principals on influence of gender on management options were for competition: 2.22 for male and 1.85 for female. Accommodation recorded mean scores of 2.47 for male and 2.32 for female; avoidant had 2.18 respectively for male and female principals. These mean ratings were below 2.50. For collaboration management option, mean ratings of 2.51 and 2.45 for male and female principals respectively were recorded. While males agreed to the use of this option, the females disagreed. Subsequently the grand mean (x) was 2.40 and 2.31 which are points below 2.50 indicating that being male or female principals does not influence the use of conflict management options.

Hypothesis One

There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female principals on how psychological conflicts manifest in secondary schools in Rivers State.

Table 3: t-test Analysis of Significant Difference in the Mean Ratings Respondents on How Psychological Conflict Manifest In Schools Rivers State

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>No. of Respondents</th>
<th>x</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>t-cal</th>
<th>t-crit</th>
<th>Decision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>2.87</td>
<td>.381</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Do not reject Ho1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>2.85</td>
<td>.352</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>.419</td>
<td>1.96</td>
<td>Do not reject Ho1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data on Table 3 above showed that t-cal with respect to significant difference in the mean ratings on how psychological conflict manifest in secondary schools is 0.419, this value is lower than the t-crit value of 1.96 a t0.5 level of significance with the degree of freedom (df) at 238. This implied that the null hypothesis is not rejected; therefore there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female principals regarding how psychological conflicts manifest in secondary schools in Rivers State.

Hypothesis two: There is no significant difference in the mean rating of male and female principals on how gender influence use of conflict management options in secondary schools in Rivers State.
Table 4: t-test Analysis of Significant Difference of Mean Ratings of Male and Female Principals on How Gender Influence Use of Conflict Management Options in Secondary Schools in Rivers State

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>No. of respondents</th>
<th>X</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>t-cal</th>
<th>t-crit</th>
<th>Decision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>2.52</td>
<td>.328</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.59</td>
<td>1.96</td>
<td>Reject Ho_0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>2.32</td>
<td>.361</td>
<td>238</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data in Table 4 above indicated that there is a significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female principals on how gender influence use of conflict management options in secondary schools in Rivers State. This was because the t-cal at 4.59 is greater than t-crit at 1.96 tested at 0.5 levels, of significant with degree of freedom (df) of 238. Therefore, the null hypothesis is hereby rejected.

Discussion of Findings

Findings indicated that psychological conflicts manifest in several ways in secondary schools in Rivers State of Nigeria. Among them are that students fight themselves, abuse and insult their teachers. Teachers’ complaints are more associated to pecuniary issues and feelings of low esteem about the teaching profession. Rummel (1997), Akpan (2001), Bateman and Snell (2002), and Okon (2008) indentified that psychological conflicts manifest in secondary schools due to non-payment or delay in salaries payment and fringe benefits. They also agree that conflict may emanate from fighting, abuse and refusal to obey rules and regulations.

On influence of gender on use of conflict management options, it was discovered that both male and female principals do not use any particular conflict management option, hence, there is no significant difference. This finding does not agree with Brewer; Mitchell; and Weber (2013) and Havenga (2013) who disclosed that masculine (males) individuals scored highest on dominating(Competing) style whereas, the feminine (females) were highest on the avoidance style. However, a closer look at individual gender use of conflict management options in this study indicated that males precisely use the collaboration and compromise options as against the females who did not accept the use of any particular option and seem to use an integrated style or a mixture of all the options. Notably still, while the response to research question two disclosed that both male and female principals converge at using an integrated conflict management option or better explained they do not seem to use any particular style, the null hypothesis two insisted that there is a significant difference on how gender influences the use of conflict management options. This finding agreed with Thomas,
Thomas and Schaublut (2008) who stated that the strongest gender finding is that men scored significantly higher on competition option in the organization. Su’udy (2009) in his study between Americans and Indonesians disagreed with this and stated that both male and females preferred the avoidance style.

**Conclusion**

The conclusion drawn from this study is that psychological conflicts manifest in secondary schools in Rivers State, Nigeria. Even though it is not a good trend it helps to pave way for principals to rise up to their duties in order to reach the set goal set by government and for them to establish a coherent school climate. Importantly, it does not matter if being a male or female principal affects the occurrence of psychological conflicts. The management of conflict is a necessary issue that has to be taken seriously in the secondary schools using the most effective approach or option as indicated that though the school principals use an integrated approach, there is a significant difference in the mean rating of gender on use of conflict management options.

**Recommendations**

1. Principals in workshop settings should discuss and share experiences of conflict manifestations situations in their schools in order to benefit positively from such experiences.
2. Because psychological conflicts influence or affect the psyche of staff, principals should endeavor to reduce psychological conflicts in the schools.
3. The use of conflict management options should be according to situations and not a straight jacket system.
4. Since gender does not influence the use of conflict management options, principals should be encouraged to be proactive in management of conflicts in schools.

**Reference**


