

CAUSES, PREVENTION, MANAGEMENT AND RESOLUTION OF CONFLICT

By

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Abstract

This paper examined the root causes of conflicts and how they can be prevented, managed and resolved. God originally planned in His creation that people should live in peace and harmony with mutually beneficial relationship of giving and receiving based upon common values and purpose. And it is the desire of people to live in a world of peace and harmony but the reality today is that almost in every nation there is conflict. The origin of conflict is traced to the fall of Adam and Eve at the Garden of Eden. The first conflict in human family is between Cain and Abel whereby Cain murdered Abel and since that time till today, conflict has continued among humanity. Conflicts have been discussed in terms of intra-personal, inter-personal, intra-group, and inter-group as well as family conflicts and social conflicts. All issues involving Conflict prevention, management and resolution are adequately discussed.

God's original plan in His creation is for people to live in peace and harmony based on the principle of living for the sake of others. All dimensions of life express mutually beneficial relationship of giving and receiving based upon common values and purpose. We first learn to share and live for others in our family. This understanding of mutual benefit inherent in relationships is the basis for one of the universal principles of peace building. All beings exist and act for the sake of a partner. This means that God created all things to move towards the ideal through the operation of mutual relationships. When the individual serves the whole, the whole benefits and so does the individual.

All people desire to live in a world of peace and harmony. But the reality of the world today is tragically different. Today, we hear of wars in many nations of the world, for example, war in Afghanistan, Iraq, Palestine and Israel, the Republic of Congo, Somalia, etc. Almost in every nation there is conflict. If the world is to move towards a peaceful place to live in future, then, there is an urgent need to understand ways of resolving, preventing and managing conflict.

Concept and Nature of Conflicts

Conflict is said to occur when there is a battle, struggle, contention, disagreement, opposition, war, etc in an individual or between individuals, groups, states or nations. Conflicts can be viewed from the perspective of intra-personal, inter-personal, intra-group or inter-group. Conflict can bring about positive or negative consequences. For instance, it produces a negative outcome when it leads to open clash like riots or war which leads to destruction. When conflict is viewed from industrial relation perspectives, it may lead to:

- a) Decrease in productivity
- b) Economic stagnation
- c) Social disharmony and dislocation

From the positive perspective, conflicts lead to changes that improve upon a normal method of doing things. It could lead to:

- a) Improvement in welfare and in the conditions of services.
- b) Transparency and accountability
- c) Enhancement of political and social rights
- d) Strengthening the productive capacity of an organization or society.
- e) Promotes equal or fair sharing of societal resources.
- f) Eliminates or minimize the domination of one person over another or one nation over another.
- g) Helps parties to recognize each other's worth and pave way for reconciliation and peaceful co-existence, thereby promoting the advancement of societal goals and objectives.

It is worth mentioning here that though, some conflicts bring about positive changes as itemized above, however, the processes that bring about those conflicts hinged on the negative undertones.

Causes of Conflicts

Under this section, we will look at the origin of conflicts; factors that promote conflict; types of conflict; and the root causes of conflict. A full understanding of the above will help peace ambassadors and managers of conflicts to diagnose, prevent, manage and/or resolve conflicts in order to pave way for harmonious co-existence of individuals, groups, state and nations.

The Origin of Conflict

The origin of conflict can be traced to the fall of Adam and Eve at the Garden of Eden. God had instructed them not to eat of the fruit of the tree at the center of the garden. Contrary to the instruction of God, Satan deceived Eve and she ate of the fruit and gave some to Adam who also ate of the fruit. This disobedience exposed both Adam and Eve to the knowledge of good and evil and they quickly realized that they were naked and were ashamed and looked for a way to cover their private parts.

Causes, Prevention, Management and Resolution...

God's original ideal was for man, woman and children to grow together in obedience to God's word but they disobeyed God and consequently there was no longer normal relationship between man, woman and God. The original love between man and woman became corrupted and misdirected within the relationship.

The effects of this corrupted love are self-centeredness, love debased and tainted, greed – which is seeking power and money, jealousy of others, delight in dominating others, and weakness and giving in to temptation. It is also the reason for marriage breakdown (that is infidelity, spousal abuse, child abuse and neglect, and divorce.

The first conflict in human family is between Cain and Abel whereby Cain murdered Abel. Since that human family's false start, conflict has continued among humanity.

Factors that Promote Conflict

a) The Economic Factor

It is a clear fact that the ways and manner in which nation's resources are managed and distributed directly or indirectly may result into conflict. The fact is that when resources dwindle or become scarce, then there is bound to be struggle to grab what is left in order to meet ends. This situation breeds the potential for conflict among people at different level and sectors of the society. It may also involve nations.

In situations where the resources are readily available, if there is uneven or unjust manner of distribution and allocating them, conflict is bound to arise. A good example is the clamour for resource control by some regions of the country. The perceived injustice and unfairness creates dangerous situation and many lives and properties are lost.

Conflict is further promoted in the economic sector especially when managers of common wealth sector of the community or nation are deprived of their entitlements to favour another or others. This is most common when government functionaries display callous favouritism in governmental expenditures that create imbalances. The cry of marginalization, neglect, deprivation, etc, which is heard across the country is an expression of such frustration.

b) The Social Factor

Man being a social animal is bound to live and interact freely with others. However, when sound reasoning is side-stepped and emotionalism, fanaticism and extremism set into man's mind, he becomes difficult to control and the result is open conflict between him and others. Evidences of social conflict exist in every social setup which tends to undermine peace and unity of the nation, and especially retards progress and development.

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c) The Political Factor

This is the most important factor that promotes conflict in many nations especially the developing nations. Political power is likened to honey and wine – sweet and intoxicating. Quite a number of people, groups or communities have devoted their time and energy to acquire and retain power in governance simply because political power gives enormous control over the destiny of people and the resource in the land.

Conflict in political sphere occurs when in the quest for power, certain abnormalities are perpetrated. For instance, abnormalities in the electoral processes, such as favouring one political group or camp to the detriment of others, rigging of elections or manipulation of the state apparatus to one's advantage at the expense of others will definitely create conflict.

The most common conflicts in Nigeria under this category include:- chieftaincy affairs; political differences; boundary adjustments; environmental matters; students' unrests; land Disputes; labour; crisis; marginalization; ethnicity; and tribalism. Others are inter-religious and intra-religious matters; security problems; economic mismanagement; welfare difficulties; industrial disharmony; resource allocation; disregard of authority, communication gap; rumours; discrimination, corruption; etc.

Types of Conflict

Conflicts vary from intra-personal (within an individual) to a large extent (among nations). Conflicts can be classified as follows:-

a) Intra-Personal Conflicts: This type of conflict occurs within an individual and that is why it is often referred to as "conflict of conscience". Examples of this include:-

- 1.0 The use of time
- 2.0 The choice of a partner
- 3.0 Some moral questions
- 4.0 Taking either the mother's or father's advice
- 5.0 Stress
- 6.0 Anger
- 7.0 Self-hatred
- 8.0 Addiction

b) Inter-Personal Conflict: This is the type of conflict that occurs between two or more individuals. Examples:

- 1.0 Conflict between a man and his wife (marital tension)
- 2.0 Conflict between man, woman and children (family strife)
- 3.0 Conflict between man and man (disputes with friends and neighbours)
- 4.0 Conflict at work place or school

c) **Intra-Group Conflict:** This is the type of conflict that occurs between individual within a group.
Examples:

1.0 Conflict in a political party

~~2.0 Conflict in workers union~~
~~Causes, Prevention, Management and Resolution...~~

d) **Inter-Group Conflict:** This occurs between groups, associations, communities or nations.
Examples:

1.0 The ownership of crude oil deposit in Bakassi between Nigeria, Cameroon and United Nations Organisation (U.N.O).

2.0 Wars

3.0 Ethnic Tension

The Root Causes of Conflict

Every being has dual purposes. We have what is called “whole purpose” which benefits others and “individual purpose” which is concerned with self (the individual). The whole purpose is unselfish while the individual purpose is selfish. When much attention is being given to the individual purpose without relating to the whole purpose there is bound to be conflict and this is the genesis of selfishness. On the other hand when the individual purpose relates with the whole purpose and vice versa there will be perfect relationship and peace will reign – this is the fruit of unselfishness.

Conflict begins within the individual. There are two sides of an individual – the unselfish side and the selfish side. These two phenomena throw a man into confusion and if the selfishness overshadows the unselfishness, conflict is the result. However, if the reverse is the case then the man will have peace and he will be at peace with others.

The Root Causes of Family Conflict:

When members pursue self-interest over the welfare of the family conflict is bound to occur. The root causes of such conflicts include:

- a) Infidelity
- b) Money issues
- c) Sibling rivalry
- d) Careerism

The Root Causes of Social Conflict

When groups and nation pursue self-interest over the greater good then there will be conflict. The root causes of such conflict include:

- a) Abuse of power
- b) Ethnic tensions
- c) Legal disputes
- d) War

Generally, the root causes of conflict, whether family or social, is centered on the dividing line between good and evil (unselfishness and selfishness).

a) Unselfishness

Unselfishness is the basis of goodness and is centered on the principles of living for the sake of others. The characteristics of unselfishness are self-control, service to humanity, fair-mindedness, ~~generosity, forgiveness, and humility.~~ ~~The fruit of unselfishness is True Love which is~~ characterized by living for the sake of others, unconditional giving (invest and forget), and forgiveness.

b) Selfishness

Selfishness is the basis of evil and is centered on the principles of living for oneself. The characteristics of selfishness are lust, exploitation, prejudice, greed, vengeance and arrogance. The fruit of selfishness is False Love which is characterized by living only for the sake of oneself, conditional giving (calculating reward), and holding grudges.

It is worth mentioning here that false love is changeable and short-lived, is without principles of higher purpose and is the fruit of weak character. Attitudes and actions based on false love promote conflict. False love gives room for anger and jealousy, infidelity and promiscuity, disrespect and rebellion, and violence and murder.

Prevention and Management of Conflict

It is often stressed that justice is the balm that soothes any pain or injury. Justice is the key to any good and harmonious relationship. Indeed it is the panacea for peace. To prevent conflict, justice must prevail. Justice and fairness should be used as a yardstick for the prevention of family, economic, social and political conflicts.

Management of Conflicts

Since human existence and society, conflicts continued to exist even though it is not our desire. As individuals and collectively too, we need to pay attention to conflicts and how to effectively manage them. The strategies needed for conflict management should be understood and applied accordingly when the situation demands for it.

Neutrality should be observed in the course of managing conflicts. The task should be approached with wisdom even as strategies are adopted. The following ways should be considered in the management of conflicts:- compromise, collaboration and integration, accommodation, avoidance and competition.

- a) **Compromise:** This is the process of give and take following a bargaining and negotiation that aims at reaching solution that is acceptable to the conflicting parties. This approach is very useful in collective bargaining between employer and employees.
- b) **Collaboration and Integration:** this is the coming together of the conflicting parties to promote organizational or group objectives and at the same time satisfying each other's objectives.
- c) **Accommodation:** This is the process of allowing either the stronger or the weaker party to behave the way it wants with the hope that the party at fault may realize its mistakes and retract.
- d) **Avoidance:** This is a case where one party in conflict acts as if the other party has not provoked it ~~or done it any damage whereas it actually has.~~
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- e) **Competition:** This is where each party in conflict tries to compete with another legally or illegally and the conflict will cease to exist when a winner emerges.

Ways of Resolving Conflicts

Let me ask this simple but sensitive question. Does fighting resolve conflict? The answer is yes and no. Yes because at times fighting can be necessary for self-defense or to defend the weak. And no because fighting and defeating an enemy does not answer his grievances or end his hatred and also the defeated are tempted to seek revenge later.

We should also know that settlements of conflict alone do not resolve conflicts. Genuine reconciliation is needed and deep hostility must be resolved. In case of crisis, stop abuse or remove victim from harm, conflict resolution then becomes possible.

Elements of Conflict Resolution

- a) Unselfishness and Selfishness
- b) Right and Wrong

c) Loving Relationship and Broken Relationship

Basis for Conflict Resolution

Conflict resolution is based on moral and ethical values. One or both sides must uphold moral and ethical principles.

Both conflicting parties must be removed from the state of conflict to a state of harmony through restoration. Indemnity conditions must be considered and efforts should be made to reverse the process by which the original harmony was lost.

Steps in Conflict Resolution

Step 1: Reflection and Reorientation (Selfishness gives way for Unselfishness)

- * Identify one's contribution to the problem
 - * Recognize how it affected the other's feeling
 - * Examine one's conscience and evaluate one's attitudes and behavior. (Recall moral and ethical values, such as empathy, respect and responsibility)
 - * Consider how one might have dealt with the problem differently (what could be done better next time)
 - * Decide to take responsibility for one's contribution to the conflict
 - * Plan how to make amends
- Some character benefits can be achieved from this step and they include:
- Releasing self-pride and guilt. (penetrates wall of denial and permits honesty in facing life)
 - Enhances compassion for others
 - Promotes inner growth.

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Step 2: Reversal and Restitution (Wrong gives way for Right)

- Reverse whatever caused the other to feel hurt and violated
- Make restitution to repair damage done
- Be open to receive restitution
- Correct injustice

The following level of restitution should be acceptable:

- Apology
- Full payment of damages
- Greater restitution is required for repeated offenses

Both sides are responsible to make the necessary efforts for restitution as assigning blame is not helpful.

Step 3: Reconciliation and Renewal (Broken Relationship gives way for Loving Relationship):

- Give up claim to retaliation
- Forgive and be open to receive forgiveness
- Resolve to help the other to change
- Foster goodwill

The benefits of reconciliation and renewal include:

- Liberating the self from hatred and resentment
- Frees the relationship to begin anew
- Opens the way to love

Responsibilities of the Offender and the Offended

The offender should admit wrong, make restitution, and continue until forgiven while the offended is to consider own faults, accept restitution and forgive. It is important that the offender and the offended should possess some virtues that support conflict resolution. They are humility, generosity and service.

- a) Humility reverses arrogance – that is admitting to not always being right and openness to learn from others.
- b) Generosity reverses greed – that is giving beyond convenience and offering without conditions or expectation of return.
- c) Service reverses exploitation – that is act of caring to meet the need of others.

The greatest act of love is winning over one's enemy. Giving even to those who have done harm to one can convert the enemy into a friend. This is capable of reversing ancient patterns of abuse and revenge.

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Supports for Conflict Resolution (Mediation)

In conflict resolution, a mediator may be required. The mediator should be a neutral and trusted helper outside the conflict. His duty is to aid both sides to find a basis for interaction and is thus only a facilitator. The burden of reconciliation remains with both conflicting sides. However, Peace Ambassadors, in the course of making peace between conflicting parties do bear some burden.

a) Attitudes of Mediator

The attitudes of a good mediator include:

- Concern for both sides
- Affirms the value of both sides
- Gains the trust from both sides that each is being treated fairly
- Aim for a win – win outcome
- Guides both sides beyond blame and accusation

b) Mediation Skills – Towards the Offender:

- Help the offender accept responsibility
- Encourage admission of wrong
- Help the offender accept the challenge of restitution
- Avoid labeling and blaming
- Praise and offer a second chance

c) Mediation Skills – Towards the Offended:

- Help the offended forgive and release grudges
- Help the offended recognize own faults
- Help the offended to accept apology
- Foster harmony and friendship with the offender

Conclusion

God's original plan in His creation is for people to live in peace and harmony with mutually beneficial relationship of giving and receiving based upon common values and purpose. In this relationship, the individual serves the whole, the whole benefits and so does the individual.

It is the desire of people to live in a world of peace and harmony but the reality today is that almost in every nation there is conflict. Conflict has been viewed from the perspective of intra-personal, inter-personal, intra-group or inter-group and can bring about positive or negative consequences.

The origin of conflict is traced to the fall of Adam and Eve at the Garden of Eden. Their disobedience exposed them to the knowledge of good and evil, consequently the original love between ~~man and woman became corrupted and misdirected within the relationship.~~
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The first conflict in human family is between Cain and Abel whereby Cain murdered Abel. Since that time till today the human family has been in conflict.

Conflicts have been classified as intra-personal, inter-personal, intra-group, and inter-group. They also fall into two groups – family conflicts and social conflicts. The root causes of conflict, whether family or social, is centered on the dividing line between good and evil (unselfishness and selfishness). When members of a family or groups and nations pursue self-interest over the welfare of the family or the greater good of the other, conflict is bound to occur.

Conflict can be prevented and managed, depending on the knowledge and skills of the individual. The applications of these depend on the type of conflict and situation within or between individuals and groups or nations.

Justice and fairness are crucial in preventing conflicts and ensuring peace and tranquility which are the basis for any meaningful progress and development. Neutrality should be observed in the course of managing conflicts. The task should be approached with wisdom even as strategies are adopted.

In resolving conflict, at times fighting can be necessary for self-defense or to defend the weak. But fighting and defeating an enemy does not answer his grievances or end his hatred and also the defeated are tempted to seek revenge later. Also, settlements of conflict alone do not resolve conflicts. Genuine reconciliation is needed and deep hostility must be resolved.

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