ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Conflict Management and Service Delivery Between Honourable Commissioners and Permanent Secretaries: A Study of Anambra State

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Abstract

The study is on conflict management and service delivery between honourable commissioners and permanent secretaries in Anambra State. The study was designed to examine how conflicts if not well managed could affect service delivery to citizens in the study area. The study was motivated by the seemingly observed bureaucracy in the provision of some dividends of democracy (services) in form of social amenities to citizens. Three objectives guided the study. Descriptive design was adopted. All workers in Anambra State House of Assembly formed the population. A sample of 45 workers who were conveniently available was drawn and used for the study. A self-made questionnaire was used for data collection. Data collection was by the direct delivery method. The percentage was used for analysis at 50% bench mark. It was gathered that causes of conflicts include abuse of power, funds misappropriation and others. Similarly, the study found that conflicts affect service delivery through delays or outright denial of such services and others. Some of the identified conflict management strategies include dialoguing, accommodation, effective communication and others. Sequel to these findings, the study concluded that if conflicts are not well managed or resolved they can affect service delivery in Anambra State. The paper recommended among other things that all leaders or office holders should exercise their power of office judiciously to avoid abuse. Also, it is necessary that administrators and heads of establishments be proactive in settling conflicts for effective service provision in the state.

KeyWords: Conflicts, Conflict management, Service delivery, Commissioner, Permanent Secretary

INTRODUCTION

People have always existed and co-existed as group. These could be cultural, ethnic, social, political or work group. Political organizations such as the government house also exist as group. The background of people in the sub group could have resulted from ethnic, cultural, educational or political consideration. The innumerable interdependence that is inherent in organization makes conflict inevitable. Conflict which is an overt behavior in which one seeks to advance one's own interest in the relationship with others can arise within and among groups and subgroups, Even though conflict is thought to be undesirable, it is usually impossible to create a conflict-free management, Conflict could occur in any administrative set up, but the degree and frequency of the occurrence can create an unpleasant atmosphere leading to job satisfaction and poor productivity)Awarn & Ajum, ٢٠١٥(. Deterioration in the management of any set up like the political offices will become evident if conflicts are not managed well through systematic process. It is common knowledge that conflict exists and will continue to exist in almost every conceivable organization where human beings are required to concentrate and contribute towards the accomplishment of organizational objective like in the administration and governance of a state. The damages of some conflict are very costly to an organization in terms of waste in human, material and financial resources and delay in service delivery to the populace. Since conflicts arise in all spheres of life, when they are well-managed it enables the people concerned to function effectively. Effective management of conflicts is necessary because research indicates that management executives are spending twice as much time settling employees' disputes than they did a decade ago)Accountemps, ٢٠٠٦(.

Conflict management refers to the act of controlling or handling conflicts in human relations.

This is necessary because if conflict is well managed and resolved to the mutual satisfaction of the parties concerned, it will lead to some qualitative development in the relation between the parties (Zwalchir, 2008). The importance of conflict management cannot be over-emphasized. If conflicts are adequately and properly managed, they yield positive outcomes which should be the goal of every administration. In any setting, if conflicts are managed properly by applying the appropriate course of action, the management can increase its performance in terms of utilizing the scarce resources and achieving organizational obligations (Awarn & Ajum, 2015). It will also help workers and leaders to be more effective in the discharge of their duties. This is because proper management of conflicts will build confidence and assurances in organizations.

In the same manner, good management of conflict could serve as an energizer and a vitalizer in groups and improvement in organizational design and maximum functioning. In essence, good conflict management will lead to organizational effectiveness. Also, Alper, Ijovold and Law (2001) aver that good conflict management could lead to creation of good human relation among staff, promote healthy working environment and help eliminate monotony and boredom among others.

In every state, the citizens expect to gain some benefits from the government from the taxes and other resources of the state. These services are approved by the governor via the concerned commissioners. However in the organization of the state government, the executive governor is at the helm of affairs followed by the deputy governor, then commissioners and the permanent secretary (Ebelebe, 2019). Despite the fact that the commissioner is higher in rank than the permanent secretary, the permanent secretary is the Chief Accountant of the state. It is within his power to approve funds for any project or expenses to be made. This means that it is within the permanent secretary's jurisdiction to scrutinize the amount stipulated for any project to be delivered to the state. When the budget is above the financial capacity of the state, he or she (permanent secretary) reserves the right to disapprove such or to decline. Ideally such unapproved projects or services are not attended to or delivered to the general public. The disapproval of the budgeted amount by the permanent secretary may create a feud between him and the commissioner. This is because the permanent secretary's job is a career appointment and the position is more permanent than that of the commissioner (which is a political appointment). The position of a permanent secretary is subject to auditing at any time (Uchewi, 2018). Therefore the permanent secretary will be held accountable for any misappropriation of funds once it is confirmed that he or she appended his or her signature on it. The permanent secretary may be held accountable to pay back the excess funds and that may seriously affect his retirement benefits. In order to forestall such occurrence, the permanent secretary is always careful to sign any money for any projects in the state.

In most cases, his refusal to sign such inflated projects may not go down well with the commissioner (who is higher in rank) but as the chief Accountant of the state, he reserves the right to approve it or not. Then in such scenario, this may cause a conflict between the commissioner and the permanent secretary. This conflict if not well handled or managed may hinder the extent to which the services expected to be delivered to the public are being provided or executed. Sometimes, the Commissioner being higher in rank than the permanent secretary, might use veto power to bypass the permanent secretary to access the needed funds (which may be inflated) to execute such projects. In such instances, if any ugly situation comes out of it, the permanent secretary will not be held responsible (Uchewi, 2018). However, problems may come when the tenure of the commissioner has elapsed and he has gone and auditors discovered any form of funds misappropriation which the permanent secretary did not have a hand in. This often occurs when the commissioner has finished his tenure and might have absconded out of sight. The big question now is, how does conflict between the honourable commissioner and permanent secretary affect

service delivery in Anambra State?

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Every state government owes its citizens some responsibilities which include the provision of social amenities like good roads, schools, hospitals, markets and portable water supply among others. However, these amenities are provided through the office of the commissioners who are appointed by the state governor. In the organogram of every state government, there is usually a permanent secretary who is the fourth in rank after the commissioner. However, the position of a permanent secretary is a career position unlike that of the commissioner that is political. It is the duty of the permanent secretary to approve expenditures for all projects. Sometimes, he might refuse especially if there is over-expenditure or a padded budget. His refusal may create conflict between him and the commissioner which may affect the extent of service delivery if not well managed. Now the problem of the study is to examine how conflict between the honourable commissioner and the permanent secretary could influence service delivery to citizens in Anambra State, Nigeria.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The study is designed to examine the influence of conflict on service delivery in Anambra State. Specifically, it

1) Examines causes of conflict between the honourable commissioner and permanent secretaries.
2) Identifies how conflict affects service delivery in the state.
3) Suggests ways of managing conflict between honourable commissioners and permanent secretaries for effective service delivery.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1) What are the causes of conflicts between honourable commissioners and permanent secretaries in Anambra State?
2) How do conflicts influence service delivery to citizens in Anambra State?
3) How can conflicts be managed for effective service delivery in the state?

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study is significant for the following reasons:

1. It will X-ray causes of conflict among political appointees which will help each member to avoid the conflicts.
2. The methods of conflict management which the study will highlight will lead to better working relationship between the honourable commissioners and the permanent secretary.
3. The amicable resolution of conflicts among the political elites will help the citizens to receive their entitled services from the government as at when due.
4. Some of the conflict management strategies which the study will highlight will better conflict resolution and better service delivery in the state.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Concept of Conflict

There is no universally agreed definition of conflict. However, some authors have attempted to present some definition. Conflict refers to some form of friction, disagreement or discard arising within a group or a setting when the beliefs or actions of one or more members of the group are either resisted by or unacceptable to one or more member of the another group (Duze, 2011). In the same vein, Akuse (2012) sees conflict as a clash of interest between or among people or a group; also Micheal (2013) views conflict as an activity which takes place when conscious beings wish to carry out mutually inconsistent acts concerning their wants, needs or obligations. In the views of Rakshim (2014), a conflict is an escalate of a disagreement which is characterized by the existence of behavior in which the beings (individuals) are actively trying to damage one another Based on the foregoing definitions, one can define conflict as a dispute that occurs when interest, goals or values of different individuals or groups are incompatible with each other. This results to situations whereby the affected individuals frustrate each other in an attempt to achieve their objectives. Conflict is a part of

organizational life and may occur between individuals, between the individual and the group and between groups.

A conflict is a condition or situation that ensues when one party feels that another party has frustrated or is about to frustrate some concern (Obi, 2014). Most often, conflicts arise due to lack of harmony between or among groups. That is why Zwalchir (2008) conceives of conflict as a relationship which exists between two or more parties who believes they have incompatible goals, interest, perceptions and preferences, conflicts arise when individuals have varied interest opinions and thought processes and are willing to compromise with each other. Conflict is an unpleasant fact in any organization as long as people compete for jobs, resources, power recognition and security. People generally view conflicts to be generally dysfunctional (Jere, 2013); however, it can be beneficial or positive.

A conflict can have a positive effect when it encourages creativity, new looks and the development of human capabilities to handle interpersonal differences. In the same vein conflicts can be negative when it creates resistance to change, establishes turmoil in organization or group or interpersonal relations (Azure, 2014). In the school setting, conflicts are bound to occur. It could be between or among teachers, between teachers and principals or teachers and outsides. No matter the designation, conflict does not really create a good working relationship among co-workers. When teachers clash in the school, they tend to use the opportunity to rent anger on suspects.

In any human setting, conflicts are bound to occur as it is a feature of an organization because people differ in values. Any kind of conflict goes with opposition or interactions, disagreement or controversies about ideas, values, and ways of life (Uchewi, 2018). Conflict could be seen as a clash of divergent views from people working in a place or a setting. When the commissioner and the permanent secretaries hold different views and values about the service to be delivered or the amount of money to be spent on a project, there may be conflict. Anytime an action by one party is perceived as preventing or interfering with goals, needs or actions of another, conflict is said to occur. Negative situations and features are which give rise to inefficiency, ineffectiveness or dysfunctional consequences are associated with conflicts. However, Ojo and Abolade (2008) assert that in some cases, conflict can actually stimulate creative problem solving and improve situations for all parties involved.

Causes of Conflict

Conflict emanates from a number of sources. Some of the sources are examined in the succeeding paragraphs as submitted by Edet, Benson and Williams (2017).

a). **Interaction between different levels of workers in an organization**

Conflict can emanate from the interactions between members of an organization, staff, and management and across the organization as members strive to achieve the goals and objectives of the establishment. As workers discharge their different duties, one may step on another's toes which might spark off conflicts.

b). Misappropriation of Resources

In any setting resources, especially finances are usually in short supply. There is never a time that human needs are not more than the available resources. Hence when the scarce resources are not prudently managed by the administrators, it might lead to conflicts.

c). Poor Communication

Communication is the exchange of ideas from one person to another. In any human relation or work place, workers need to communicate information to their fellows for smooth running of the organization and effective discharge of duty. When there is poor communication among workers there may be conflict which may arise from poor discharge of duty or negligence due to lack of communication.

d). Abuse of Power

Sometimes in place of work, conflicts may arise if there is abuse of power. When a boss misuses his power, the subordinates may react unfavourably

which may lead to conflict. If a boss does not respect the integrity of junior workers, and begins to treat them badly (because he is higher in rank) this bad attitude may give rise to conflict.

Meaning of Conflict Management

Conflict is a natural occurrence in any organization. The process of handling conflicts so as not to deter the attainment of organizational goals is referred to as conflict management. Rahim (2002) sees conflict management as the process of limiting the negative aspects of conflict while increasing its positive aspects. This means that there is need to devise means of reducing the ills associated with conflicts and maximize its benefits. It is aimed at enhancing progress and group outcomes including effectiveness or performance in an organizational setting.

Armstrong (2011) states that conflict management could be defined as conscious and concerted effort by either direct/indirect parties to a conflict or invited parties to take proactive or reactive measures to prevent and contain conflict occurrences. It is a term used synonymously with conflict regulation. In the view of Best (2017), conflict management encompasses conflict limitation, conflict containment and conflict litigation. Continuing, Best avers that conflict management include the entire areas of addressing conflict positively at different stages including those efforts made to prevent conflict by being proactive.

In the views of Orpelatada (2012), conflict management includes skills of negotiating and resolving disagreement. This means conflict management is the way to handle difficult people and tense situations with diplomacy and tact. It is a way of removing barriers to something in order to enable agreement. Accordingly, Tschannenn-Moran (2011) states that conflict management is a philosophy and a set of skills that assists individuals and groups in better understanding and dealing with conflicts as it arises in all aspects of their lives. Managing conflict in schools can involve interaction or structuring the forms of interaction or reducing or changing external pressure (Ohaka, 2017).

Conflict management involves acquiring skills related to conflict resolution, establishing structures of conflict models, putting strategic measures as well as approaches in place in order to see that conflicts arising do not truncate the stability of the organization. Best (2017) contends that conflict management is a way of ameliorating adverse effects of conflict through the parties involved in the conflict. This means that in managing conflict well, the conflicting parties or individuals must be part of the process of conflict management. This is necessary because without the consent of the warring or conflicting parties, the conflicts may not be settled.

Management of conflict is an essential tool to solve problems of conflicts so that its negative impacts will be overcome. The aim of conflict management is to enhance learning and group outcomes including effectiveness or performance in an organizational setting. It is equally done to prevent the eruption of destructive conflict, facilitate a move from violent to spoken conflict and enable a transformation from conflict to lasting peace.

Conflict Management Strategies

A lot of strategies have been advanced by experts which have been used to address conflicts. Eric (2015) advances five conflict management strategies which could be adopted by administrators at all levels to manage conflicts. The strategies are explained in the succeeding paragraphs.

a. **Accommodating strategy:** this strategy entails giving the opposing side what it wants. The use of the accommodating strategies often occurs when one of the conflicting parties wishes to keep the peace or perceives the issues as minor. The other party may decide to take the blame or relax in order to accommodate the other party simply for the sake of harmony.
b. **Avoidance strategy**: this strategy entails putting off the opposing or conflicting party indefinitely. The essence is to avoid confrontations that may lead to clashes. The avoider between that by delaying or ignoring the conflict the problem or conflict could be resolved without necessarily confronting the

offender. The strategy of avoiding is mostly used by people of low esteem or those who hold low power positions. Though avoidance could be difficult, however in some circumstances it could be profitable especially if the conflict leads to the dismissal of an unproductive teacher in which case a more productive teacher is hired as a replacement.

c. **Collaboration strategy**: collaboration as a way of managing conflict demands integrating ideas put forward or suggested by the different members of the setting. In the school setting, different teachers and other staff may present different suggestions about an issue. The differing opinions about one issue may be a cause of conflict. In order to avoid lashes, it will be necessary to use collaboration. In collaboration the different views are harmonized to arrive at an agreeable conclusion. To use collaboration demands a significant time commitment which may not be possible in some other conflict.

d. **Compromising strategies**: compromising demands that each opposing party give up some elements of their position or opinion in order to establish a common though not agreeable solution. This method of managing conflict is ideal for cases where the conflicting parties hold equal power or position. This strategy is widely used by businessmen when transacting businesses.

e. **Competing:** competition operates as a zero-seem game in which one side wins and other loses the competitive strategy works best in a limited number of conflicts such as emergency situations.

Other conflict management strategies according to Zwalchir (2008) include confrontational approach, dialoguing, problem-solving approach and effective communication.

Conflict and Service Delivery

The occurrence of conflicts between workers in any organization has a way of influencing the smooth running of the organization. In the political arena, the same applies. The permanent secretary and the honourable commissioner are principal stakeholders in the state government. Each plays critical roles in the smooth administration of the state. When there is a conflict between them many things might go wrong. For example Uchewi (2018) notes that a feud between two principal workers will affect smooth administration which might hinder the attainment of organizational goals. In the same manner, unresolved conflict has a way of slowing down the progress of workers (Andy, 2014). In any setting good working relationship is critical to progress, if workers are not in good terms with each other for any reason, it will affect their productivity which will invariably affect progress.

On his part, Ebelebe (2019) argues that disputes (conflicts) may cause a distortion of already proposed plan or might make workers to lose their stand for quality delivery. Unresolved conflicts in a work place when allowed to linger can make people to lose interest in each other which might affect their dedication to duty and possibly quality of services.

Theoretical Framework

This study will be based on Theory of Conflict Management by Weber in 1906. The theory states that the society is an arena of conflict and struggle over resources between dominant and subordinate groups. The theory holds that there are many status and groups in a society which possess varying degrees of social power. Also, power plays a role in politics, ethnicity, gender and religion. In the same manner, the theory also recognizes the importance of economic conditions in producing inequality and conflict in society but included power and prestige as other sources of inequality. Weber defined power as the ability of a person within a social relationship to carry out his or her own will despite resistance from others, and prestige as a positive or negative social estimation of honour.

The implication of this theory to the study is very obvious because in the political system, there is a hierarchy in which authority flows. Members of the state house of assembly just like every other organization can engage in conflicting situations either because of their job dispositions, power, perception, or in their struggle for power and

aspirations. Most often, different categories of workers in government house clash among themselves, or with their leadership when they are not satisfied with their behavior or abuse of office. The outbreak of conflict with others will lead to low morale, hampered harmony and poor work motivation. In the case of conflict between the permanent secretary and the honorable commissioner, it might lead to a delay in the disbursement of funds for the projects or outright disapproval of same.

METHODOLOGY

The study is a descriptive survey. It aims at describing the situations between permanent secretaries and honourable commissioners. The population of the study is all the workers in Anambra State House of Assembly. A sample of 45 house members was conveniently selected based on willingness and availability as at the time of data collection. A self-designed structured questionnaire was used by the researcher in eliciting data for the study. The questionnaire was validated by a senior lecturer from Chukwuemeka Odimegwu Ojukwu University Igbariam, Anambra State with a reliability index of 0.72. Direct delivery method (DDM) was used in data collection while the percentage was used for data analysis at 50% bench mark. The choice of percentage was due to simplicity and ease of interpretation by the lay readers.

RESULTS

Research Question 1: What are the cases of conflicts between honourable commissioners and permanent secretaries in Anambra State?

Table 1 shows that abuse of veto power (93.3%) and misappropriation of resources (88.9%) are the lead causes of conflict between honourable commissioner and permanent secretaries in government house. It is equally evident from Table 1 that all the items have affirmative responses above 5% which means that the items are all valid.

Research Question 2: How does conflict influence service delivery to citizens in Anambra State?

Table 1: Causes of Conflicts between Honourable Commissioners and Permanent Secretary

S/O	Statement	Agreed No	%	Disagreed No	%
1.	Insubordination	38	83.4	07	15.6
2.	Negligence	23	51.1	22	48.9
3.	Poor communication	30	66.7	15	33.3
4.	Abuse of veto power	42	93.3	03	6.7
5.	Misappropriation of resources	40	88.9	05	11.1
6.	Poor working relationship	39	86.7	06	13.3

Table 2: Influence of Conflict on Service Delivery in Anambra State

S/ N	Statement	Agreed No	%	Disagreed No	%
1.	Conflicts can lead to delay in service delivery	40	88.9	05	11.1
2.	It could cause distortion of budgets for projects.	29	64.4	16	35.6
3.	Poor conflict resolution can make citizens not to receive their entitled dividends of democracy	42	93.3	03	6.7
4.	It could lead to delivery of poor quality services	38	84.4	07	15.6

Result in table 2 shows that conflict could affect service delivery by making citizens not to receive their entitled divideds of democracy (95.3%) and may cause poor quality service delivery (88.9%). All the items in table 2 are seen to be valid as they all have agreed percentage response above 50%.

Research Question 3: How can conflicts be managed for effective service delivery in Anambra State?

Table 3 shows that dialoguing (95.6%), effective communication (88.9%) and collaboration (86.7%) are the widely accepted conflict management strategies. Other strategies include accommodation (66.7%) and confrontation (77.8%). However, it

could be seen that avoidance strategy (28.9%) was not regarded as influential since its affirmative response is less than 50%.

Table 3: Conflict Management Strategies for Managing Conflicts for Effective Service Delivery

S/O	Statement	Agreed		Disagreed	
		No	%	No	%
1.	Accommodation	30	66.7	15	33.3
2.	Collaboration	39	86.7	06	13.3
3.	Avoidance	13	28.9	32	71.1
4.	Confrontational approach	35	77.8	10	22.2
5.	Dialoguing	43	95.6	02	4.4
6.	Effective communication	40	88.9	05	11.1

DISCUSSION

The study was designed to examine the influence of conflict between the honourable commissioners and the permanent secretaries on service delivery in Anambra State. The study was necessitated by the seemingly poor delivery of dividends of democracy (like good roads, hospitals, schools and water supply) to the citizens of the state. Three research questions guided the study. It was gathered that the major causes of conflicts are abuse of veto power and misappropriation of resources. These findings are in tandem with the submission of Edet, Benson and Williams (2017) who noted that most leaders' mistake is the wrong use or exercise of their power of office. Every appointment goes with some level of power which the holder of the office is expected to wield, however caution must be observed when one is exercising his or her power to avoid abuse of same. It is necessary that office holders use their power within acceptable limit and with purpose attainment as their key drive. This is because when purpose of anything is defeated abuse of same is inevitable.

The study discovered that conflicts affect service delivery by delaying the delivery or outright denial of such services. The occurrence of a conflict poses serious threats to the speed at which a project is executed. For example when the needed funds are not made available due to conflicts the workers will stop work and this might cause a delay in the delivery of the service especially when it is time bound.

In order to enhance service delivery the study identified some conflict management strategies which include dialoguing and collaboration. Dialogue according to Eric (2015) is a very potent conflict management strategy because it affords each warring party the opportunity to be heard and to air out their grievances to the panel for reconciliation. Some conflicts are due to misrepresentation of ideas, hence during dialogue each party is allowed to explain his or her intentions for the actions taken. That may be the reason why dialogue has been adopted as the best conflict management technique by administrators.

CONCLUSION

The study examined the influence of conflicts between honourable commissioners and permanent secretaries on service delivery in Anambra State. It identified some causes of conflicts to include abuse of power, misappropriation of funds among others. Conflicts affect service delivery by either delaying the delivery, or outright denial of such services and others. The identified conflict management strategies include but are not limited to dialoguing, accommodation and effective communication. Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that conflicts if not well managed or resolved can affect service delivery in Anambra State.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study findings, the following are recommended:

1. One of the causes of conflicts is abuse of power; hence all leaders or office holders should endeavour to exercise their power of office judiciously to avoid abuse.
2. Misappropriation of funds was found to cause a conflict; hence office holders are advised to be prudent in their management of scarce resources.
3. Conflict was seen to affect the extent to which services are delivered to citizens; hence it is necessary that administrators and heads of

establishments be proactive in settling conflicts for effective service provision in the state.

4. Some conflict management strategies were identified; hence administrators and heads of organizations are expected to adopt the best strategy that will suit their office for a conflict-free working relation.

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