

Chapter 7

Psychology in Peacebuilding and Peaceful Co-Existence in Nigeria

Y. H. Usman

Introduction

Conflict is inevitable in human life because nature had created human beings in diverse and conflicting ways. From the human psyche itself there are diversities in human temperament and what have you differ, some are introverts, others extroverts, some impulsive while others are gentle and calm, some are submissive and obedient while others are arrogant, self assertive and egocentric as well as those self-esteem and rebellious, who do not accept or even tolerate any attempt to subdue them. These diverse and conflicting behaviour traits can be regarded as the foundation of conflict among humans.

It is, however, important to note that not all conflicts are bad and negative, they facilitate competitions and enhance achievements and attainments and they create societal balance and liberate individuals, groups and communities, hitherto dominated and marginalized. However, conflicts become a source of concern and worrisome when they result into violence` with destruction of lives and property as consequences. The questions we need to ask and answer at this point are: What is conflict, and what are the types of conflict, being experienced in the Nigerian society? What are the major underlying causes of the conflicts being experienced in Nigeria? How are conflicts resolved? In addition to the above, there is the need to enquire about the roles that psychology as a discipline can play in conflict resolution and peace building with a view to enhancing peaceful coexistence in the Nigerian society.

Meaning of Conflicts

The concept has been defined in different ways by scholars. According to Nichetson in Omisore and Abiodun (2014) conflict is an existing state of disagreement or hostility between two or more people. In a situation where two or more parties are at discord or parallel on the same issues or pursuing incompatible goals, such parties can be termed to be engaged in a conflict. Omisore and Abiodun (2014) on their own account see conflict as a manifestation of disagreement, anger, quarrel hatred, destruction, killing, or war. The scholar also added that:

Any unto warded attitude capable of charging up the political or social environment is likely to culminate in conflict. Greed covetousness, self-centeredness address, discontent, envy,

arrogance, rudeness, impunity among other acts, are capable of producing a breakdown of human relation. In a way these vice are innate attributes of the conflict nature of man (pp.2).

Barash and Webel (2002) in Omisore and Abiodun (2014) viewed conflict as difference in perceptions, which may not necessarily result into hostility, in the view of these scholars therefore conflict may simply means: “a different interpretation of a motive or a different world view. These include religion, custom, cosmologies or values, which may never result into serious confrontations”. However, Jeong (2002) suggested that incompatibility of views, values and perceptions may result into hostility or physical confrontation when differences reach a crescendo. This definition is supported by that of conflict sensitivity consortium (2022) which defined conflict as the result of a disagreement between actors on the basis of perceived incompatible goals”.

Several other definitions of conflict have been given by scholars, for instance, cross, Names and Beck (1979) in Omisore and Abiodun (2014) defined conflict as “Differences between and among individuals” Wilmot (1985) in Omisore and Abiodun defined conflict as “ an expressed struggle between at least two interdependent parties who perceive incompatible goals, scarce rewards and interference from the other party in achieving their goals” cited, Borisoff and Victor (1998). Similarly, Thomas (2003) in Omisore and Abiodun (2014) defined conflict as a “disagreement in options between people or groups, due to differences in attitudes, beliefs, values or needs.” the scholars added that in the business world differences in such characteristics as work experience, personality, peer group, environment and situation, all lead to difference in personal attitudes, belief, values or needs.

More recently, definitions of conflict have been advanced by scholars, for instance Obi (2012) has viewed conflict as a healthy part of every relationship which can exist in the form of individual, inter-personal and intergroup. Diez and Alber (2006) on their part defined conflict as the “Incompatibility of subject positions” Cloke and Gawsmith (2011) highlighted that organizational conflict is a specific type of conflict that occurs in the workplace. The scholars added:

Most executive, managers and employees face conflicts on a daily or weekly basis spending from 20 percent to as much as 80 percent of their working hours trying to resolve or contain it. It is an inevitable part of our working life that can be caused by many factors, such as different values, beliefs, opinions and points of viewed (pp540).

The above highlight by Cloke and Gaowsmith and Omisore and Abiodun (2014) has given the idea that conflicts are of different kinds. There is, therefore, the need to examine the types of conflict being experienced by human beings as

individuals as group members and as members of the larger organizations and society.

Types of Conflict

According to many scholars, conflict are of two types, positive or negative (Madiya and Shazia, 2015). Conflicts that support or benefits organizations, person, group or communities are considered to be positive conflicts while those that obstruct organizational, individual, group, communities' goal or objectives are considered dysfunctional or negative. Usually the effects a conflict has on an individual, groups or organizational goals and objective determine whether it is positive or negative (Oucho, 2002, Baker, 2011).

In actual sense, not all conflicts are bad or negative, some are necessary as they improve work performance and also support individuals, groups or organization objectives (Kinicki and Kretherner, 2008). The above view was support by Rubbin (2001) who earlier suggest in a definition of functional conflict that:

Functional conflict is one that enhances the goal congruence and ameliorates the performance of a group. Conflict that encourages healthy competition with groups results in better performance of work and higher productivity is beneficial to the organization (pp.541).

Functional or positive conflicts are, therefore desirable as they have numerous advantages as highlighted by scholars, thus:

One of the main advantages of this type of conflict is that it enables their members to identify the problems and see opportunities. Also, it can inspire to creating new ideas, learning, and growth among individuals. Thus, it is pertinent to understand that a functional conflict endured the goals of the organization and improve performance. A functional conflict brings about innovation, it enables the group to look inward which could help new ideas to be birthed (Kinicki and Kreither, 2008, pp. 541).

Negative, dysfunctional or destructive conflict on the other hand are those conflicts that impede organizational progress, if not properly managed. Such conflicts usually hinder the performance of groups and organizations and can destroy individuals, groups and organizational goals. The scholars added that:

This type of conflict may interfere with ideas exchange and then ruin relationship. Hence, dysfunctional conflict does not allow organizational goals to be achieved, thereby leading to underutilisation of resources and reduced productivity. This conflict type is reflected in situation such as when individuals who are competing allows their interest to override the goals of business

or managers withhold information from one another or employees sabotaging others work, either intentionally or subthly (Kinicki and Kreither, 2008 Pp. 541-542).

The above submissions have suggested some of the causes of conflicts by individuals, groups and organizations. It is therefore imperative to examine the major causes of conflict. It is also equally important to note that conflict can take many dimensions, they can be inter personal, interpersonal, intragroup, inter-communal, inter-ethic, inter or intra religion, etc.

Causes of Conflict

Many factors have been found to cause conflict among individuals, groups and organizations. From the definitions of scholars cited, a number of factors have been suggested to be the major causes of conflict, the common factors include: incompatibilities of goals, limited resources and intrusion from others, such factors also include perception, social struggle or disagreement; quarrel between persons or with the context of groups; contrary ideas, irreconciled emotions and conflicting thought, as, values and actions between individuals, groups and organization. (Hocker and Wilmot, 2013; Robbin, 2005, Tschannen-moran 2001, Doherty and Guyler, 2008; madiya and shazia, 2015, Janaz De, Dowd Schneide.

In organizations, factors such as specialization, common resources, goals differences, interdependence authority relationships. Roles and expectation and jurisdictional ambiguities have been found to be among factors that cause conflicts (Tidwall, 1998; Omisore and Abiodun, 2004). Some of the factors listed above can be internally caused or externally sourced through intrusion, as argued by scholars,

Effects of conflicts

Conflicts in most cases, especially the negative or dysfunctional ones have negative effects on individuals, groups and organizations. For example, scholars have found that workers in organization organizations exhibit psychological responses such as inattentiveness to other things; lack of interest in work, job dissatisfaction; work anxiety and estrangement or alienation from others as well as frustration, in terms of behavioural responses, individuals have exhibited excessive smoking, alcoholism, under-eating or over-eating, aggression towards others or work sabotage, decreased comminutions and resisting influence attempts. In terms of physiological responses, individuals involved in conflicts have been found to be characterized by the following: Peptic ulcer respiratory problems such as asthma, hypertension and headaches as well as coronary problems (Omisore & Abiodun, 2014).

Negative and dysfunctional conflicts have also been found to have negative affects such as:

- i. They affect individuals and organizational the performance because their resolution consumer, time and energy of management and people involved.
- ii. The egocentric use conflicts to promote themselves at the expense of others or the organizations themselves.
- iii. When conflicts are prolonged they psychological and physically affect people involved negative; by in some cases they result in psychosomatic disorders.
- iv. Sometimes conflict resolutions consume time that could have been utilized to do more profitable engagements, and
- v. Conflicts in many cases lower moderate and causes decline in productivity as many workers are involved in reconciliation processes (Omisore and Abiodun, 2014)

As indicated earlier, however, not all conflicts are negative and dysfunctional some conflicts are positive and beneficial to individuals, groups and organizations. Such conflict have been found to have the following benefits:

- i. They motivate individuals to do better and work harder
- ii. They satisfy certain psychological needs like dominance, aggression, esteem and ago, this provides an opportunity for constructive use and release of aggressive urges;
- iii. They provide creative and innovative ideas that would accrue some benefits to parties involved,
- iv. They ease tension and make the organization environment more relaxed and conducive
- v. Parties involved come to understand each other better after resolutions have been made,
- vi. Parties involved become refreshed and more motivate to work and that enhances better productivity. and
- vii. Parties involved respect one another better than before, this improves industrial harmony (Omisore and Abiodun, 2014).

The discussion above has established the fact that conflicts are both positive and negative. While positive conflicts are beneficial to individuals, groups and organizations, negative and dysfunctional conflicts are detrimental and inimical to societal and organizational growth and development. Such conflicts when escalated often leads to the destruction of lives and property, among individuals, groups and community especially when the degenerate towards armed conflicts in the case of organizations, they bring them down by slowing down productivity or even cause organizations to close down.

Analyses of definitions and causes of conflicts have suggested, however, that conflicts are inevitable and unavoidable among individuals, groups and organization. As suggested earlier, individual are born with different traits, and which after make them incompatible and irreconcilable. Since individuals, groups

and organizational as well as the entire societal progress and advancement rely on peace and harmony among members working or residing in our group, communities and organizations peaceful coexistence must be ensured. Conflicts must be minimized among such individual, groups and organization. Similarly, mechanisms and strategies must be established for conflict resolution. It is pertinent to examine various strategies that have been employed to manage conflicts, these strategies have worked in many different groups, communities, organization and societies.

Conflict Resolution

Conflict resolution has been defined as a process of ending a dispute and reaching an agreement that satisfies all parties involved. (Shouk, 2014). The scholar added that:

If you work with others, sooner or later you will almost inevitably face the need for conflict resolution. You may need to mediate a dispute between two members of your department or you may find yourself angered by something a colleague reportedly said about you in a meeting. Or you may need to engage in conflict resolution with a client over a missed deadline. In organizations, conflict is inevitable, and good conflict management tools are essential (pp.1).

The major strategies in resolving conflict include negotiation, mediation, arbitration and litigation. For better understanding, it is pertinent to examine briefly the above strategies in order to see what they are and how they are applied to resolve conflicts, among individuals, groups and organizations (Shonk, 2024).

Negotiation is a conflict resolution mechanism or strategy that is built on exploring the interests underlying conflicting parties positions with a view to making a deal between the parties. In the case of mediation trained experts are sought, who are usually neutral in the dispute to mediate. The mediator usually does not impose any solution, he/she only encourages the parties involved to explore the conflicting interest underlying their position. Experts, usually work with the disputants together and separately with the aim of helping them discover sustainable, voluntary, and nonbinding, resolutions. Arbitration resembles court trial. In this situation, there is a third party who acts as a judge. The third party or judge makes decisions or ruling in order to end a given dispute. A typical example of arbitration took place between ASUU and the FGN in the immediate past strike action by the Union. The judge usually listens to both parties and their arguments, as well as the presentation of evidence, before passing judgement, which is legally binding. Although some of the arbitration processes can be renegotiated through lawyers, there is usually no appeal by either of the parties to the disputes. On the other hand, litigation is usually a court case where there is a defendant and a

plaintiff facing each other before a judge, who eventually rules. Litigation is usually handled by lawyers (Shonk, 2014)

Conflict resolutions normally start with less formal strategies like negotiation and mediation, it is only when they prove difficulty and inconclusive that other strategies such as arbitration and litigation are required. However, these latter options demand financial resources and also prolong disputes resolution (Shonk, 2014).

Conflict Resolution Skills

Conflict resolution requires skills and training to function effectively. It is significant to note that conflict dispute involves humans who are of different temperaments and psychological characteristics and traits. They may be of different cultural backgrounds too and at an individual level they may be under the heavy influence of different kinds of substance abuse. In some cases, parties in dispute may be under external instigation or fear of losing the case, as such they become extra ordinarily aggressive and defiant. Therefore, in order to make conflict resolution engagements successful and hitch free, the following mistakes must be avoided: avoid being defensive, over generalizing, being right psycho analysis or mind-reading, forgetting to listen playing the blame game, trying to win, making character hacks and stone walling (Scott, 2011 in Omisore and Abiodun, 2014), among others. The avoidance of the above listed mistakes would definitely require the maximum application of psychological restraints, such as the control of impulses, aggression, emotional outburst, egocentrism and self-centeredness, self-assertion, arrogance and all such other negative traits. The resolution process also requires the application of positive psychological behaviour traits such as forgiveness friendliness, emotional regulation, stress management, empathy, sincerity, handling difficult personalities, understanding, patience, persuasion, self-control and voicing out and accepting offered opinions among others. The application of these psychological behaviour traits underlines applying psychology to conflict resolution.

Application of Psychological Principles and Values in Conflict Resolution

The broad and diverse nature of psychology as a discipline has given it the opportunity to deal with human behaviour as an individual, as a group member, as a community member and as a member of formal and informal organizations. Educational psychology, for instance establishes the basis for the understanding of the individual psyche. This sub area of psychology deals with human growth and development, the development of human personality as well as delving into the intersection of nature and nurture in the development of human personality. In essential educational psychology emphasizes the overall development of human beings, especially at childhood through adolescence and adulthood stages. Humans need to be developed physically, emotionally, socially, mentally and morally, among others. Overall developed children would grow to be over all

developed youth and adolescents, and would later metamorphosed into fully developed adults. It is therefore, expected of them to be of sound moral character and good conduct; they are expected to have peace in themselves and live peacefully as group members, so, also when they serve formal organizations. Their interactions are expected to be peaceful with minimal conflicts (Farrant, 1964, Ferrant, 2004).

Social Psychology and Human Socialization

Social psychology deals with the study of human behaviour especially as it relates to dealing with other people and groups. Specifically, social psychology focuses on forming and sustaining relationships, these include social perception, which is the need to predict and understand others, forming an impression of a specific person and the accuracy of our judgements of others. This branch of psychology, also deals with human behaviour towards others, especially as it relates to aggressiveness and violence. In particular it highlights the pre-positions and biological explanations of aggressiveness which scholars consider as possibly innate response activated by frustration (Aronson, Wilson & Akert 1997).

Social psychology, also highlights the issues of moral judgements and behaviour as well as attitudes and attitude change and cognitive theories of most development, among other social issues. This branch of psychology, also studies prosocial behaviour, such as cooperation and helping. It highlights the importance of social behaviour and cooperation that is working for mutual benefit and helping one another towards the creation of a prosocial society (Wrightsmann 1977). Social psychology scholars, studies of environmental and group influences on interpersonal behaviour, have asserted that:

Social psychology is the field of study concern with interpersonal behaviour. It includes in its domain not only actual interpersonal behaviour but also any behaviour in which the presence of others is imagined or anticipated. Thus very little human behaviour escapes the concern of social psychology (Pp.32).

In essence social psychology has the mechanism of helping societies to build peace and strengthening peaceful co-existence in the Nigerian society. Knowledge of social psychology and application of its principles in conflict resolutions would go a long way in setting disputes among humans, groups and organization in the society.

Community Psychology and Sense of Community and Peaceful Coexistence

Community psychology is one of the branches of psychology which deals with human behaviour, especially in groups and community settings. The understanding of scholars in the field of community psychology is that human behaviour is largely determined by environmental factors surrounding them. Moton (2004) for instance submitted that:

Community psychology is concerned with the relationship between individuals and their social and community environments. Community psychologists contribute to the public welfare through collaborative interventions that prevent psychological and social problems, promote personal and community well-being, and empower disadvantaged citizen in groups (Pp. 421).

In order to address social problems which largely form the basis for conflicts among individuals, groups, communities and organizations, community psychologists embarked on research and actions in the areas of educational reform; homelessness, domestic violence, intergroup conflict. Substance abuse, poverty, youth violence, racial discrimination, coping with life stress, community capacity building and enhancing psychological sense of community among others thing (maton, 2014).

In carrying out their work, community psychologists are guided by certain values such as individual wellness, which includes the physical, psychological social and spiritual health of citizens, the sense of community, which involves community cohesiveness the citizens sense of belonging to a large group, social justice and empowerment, which are the equitable distribution of economic, political, and psychological resources in society; citizen participation, which is the active involvement of citizens in all aspects of community life; collaboration and community strengths, which involve working together with citizens and groups in the community as well as building on their strength and respect for human diversity, which is the genuine appreciation of human differences in ethnicity, gender, religion, age, physical disability and social class (Maton, 2004).

In addition to these values, Community Psychology also, has some principles which characterize its thinking regarding individuals, groups and communities as well as organizations. One of the principles is that social environment factors are critically important in determining and changing behaviour. Since the central concern of Community Psychology is with individual's wellness; and addressing conflicts among community members and thereby building peace and enhancing peaceful coexistence in society (Korchin 2004, Rech, Riemer, Prilleltensky, montero 2007).

Abnormal Behaviour, Peace Building and Peaceful Coexistence in Society

Abnormal psychology deals with behaviour disorders which often form the genesis conflicts among individuals, groups, communities and organizations. In many cases, conflict are caused or exacerbated by people with abnormal behaviour within groups, communities and organizations. For example, many individuals have stress and adjustment disorder. Some have anxiety-based disorder and personality disorder. Moreover, many youth members of the society, nowadays, have substance use and other addictive disorders in addition to the behaviour disorder of childhood and adolescence. The effects of the above listed

behaviour disorders are usually enormous for peaceful co-existence in society and could further hinder any effort towards building peace in the society. Society members with behaviour disorder are therefore mostly irrational and therefore, have little coexistence. When people cannot manage stress and make necessary adjustments to life situations, they are bound to be frustrated and behave aggressively, thereby causing conflict in their interactions with others (Carson, Butcher, 1992, Barlow & Durand, 2002).

Organisational Psychology and Industrial Harmony and Peaceful Co-existence

Organizational psychology is a branch of psychology dealing with human behaviour in organizations and industries. Whether formal or informal organizations are managed by humans as such they are affected by diversities in human behaviour. When individuals with psychological disorder, such as personality and substance-abuse and addictive disorders become too many in an organization, conflicts may hardly be avoided and it takes a lot of time, resources and efforts to get them resolved (Emeka, 2005).

Scholars have likened organization with human beings and as such living things. Emeka (2005) elaborate that:

People breath life and purpose and energy into organisation and energy into organization. An organization has a manner, spirit, tempo, nature and character. It has moods, joys, fears and sorrows. But most important of all, an effective organization has purpose that is shared by all its members to which they willingly commit their efforts. Where you have people working together, they can do almost everything (Emeka, 2005. Pp.4).

Whenever people come together in organizations, their individual differences, interms of behaviour, begin to manifest. The manifestations of these behaviour patterns would equally begin to cause disagreements and conflicts among them. Specifically, for example, there could be disagreements between the overall leader and his deputies or between the board chairman of an organization and the managing directors. Although such conflicts may not necessarily be destructive, they sometimes generate into serious chaos, thereby affecting the working of the entire organization. Some conflicts are between individual workers or members of an organizations, such conflicts are equally devastating. Emeka (2005) added that:

“These are usually emotionally costly conflicts both for the individual and for the group he is battling. Such a conflict shows down decisions, distorts plans and intensifies pain (Pp.94)”.

Whatever dimension organizational conflict takes their management and resolution required knowledge of human psychology. Those involved in the

management and resolution need to understand why people behave the way they do.

Clinical Psychology and Behaviour Modification among Individuals and Groups

Clinical psychology is the branch of psychology dealing with behaviour modification. Since conflicts are caused and aggravated by conflicting and in most cases abnormal behaviour of some individual elements within society such elements need to be identified and their behaviour corrected or modified. Peace can only be build and peaceful co-existence assured, when all people behave correctly and ideally. Society can only have peace and progress when its members sound moral behaviour. Individuals therefore must behave according to ideal norms in all their dealings with fellow individuals and also, in groups as community members and as members of organizations. The questions that need to be answered at this point, however are who are clinical psychologists and how do they modify behaviour. Scholars in the field of clinical psychology have elaborated on these issues thus:

“Clinical psychology is concerned with understanding and improving human functioning. Along with other fields of psychology and the behavioural sciences, it shares the task of increasing knowledge about the principles of psychological functioning in “people in general” but its unique concern is with the human problem person in particular. As one of the so-called mental health professions, clinical psychology shares responsibility for increasing the well being of psychologically troubled people. As a clinical field, it is dedicated to improving the lot of individuals in distress, using the best knowledge and technologies available, while striving through research to increase the knowledge and sharpen the techniques needed for improve intervention in the future (Korchin 2004, Pp.3)”.

The above narration has clarified the work of clinical psychologists which is mainly the identification of people with mental health problem (i.e people with any form of behaviour disorder) e.g aggression, frustration, trauma, deprivation, personality disorder, substance drug addictive disorders, etc. And which are the main triggers of conflicts among individuals as they relate with other individuals as group members, as community members or as members of organization. They also carryout interventions through clinical assessment in form of interview, psychological testing, psychotherapy of different types among others.

Conclusion

The conceptualisation of psychology as the science of conflict resolution has been substantiated in the analyses above. Most branches of psychology focused on human behaviour in different settings and situations. Educational psychology for example, deals with the origin of human behaviour, human physical development,

the development of human personality social and moral development, as well as mental development of individual. In fact, educational psychology deals with the overall development of individual from infancy to adulthood. Social psychology focuses on human social development, which is the interaction between individual as they come together or relate with one another. Community psychology focuses on ensuring community cohesiveness and to correct societal anomalies so that frustration, deprivations, discrimination would be curtailed while abnormal psychology on the other hand deals with aberration in human behaviour which are referred to as behaviour disorder and which are the main trigger of conflicts in societies. Clinical psychology, on the other hand, seeks to modify abnormal behaviour by providing interventions for the individual diagnosed with abnormal behaviour.

In sum, application of the principles and values as well strategies developed or suggested by the different branches of psychology discussed, would therefore, go a long way in enabling leaders charged with the responsibilities of conflict resolution. In view of this the following recommendations are hereby, forwarded:

Recommendations

Leaders involve with conflict resolution, whether through negotiation, mediation, arbitration or litigation are encouraged to acquaint themselves with the following programmes of psychology:

1. Educational Psychology: so as to understand the origin of human behaviour, types of behaviour as well as causes of behaviour and the various stages of human development. This would enable them know why people behave the way they do.
2. Social psychology: so as to understand human behaviour in groups. This is the basis of socialisation among humans, the more socialised people are the more likely they would live in peace and harmony:
3. Abnormal psychology: This deals with behaviour disorders. Without identifying and understanding people with behaviour disorders and their peculiar problems, the work of conflict resolution would be extraordinarily difficult;
4. Community Psychology: This deals with community well-being. Since they maintain the view that most human problems that develop into behaviour disorders and by extension conflict situations originate from the community, this programme of psychology individual strategies to address social problem in the community. Thereby addressing on how best to overcome them for a greater peaceful co-existence in the society.
5. Clinical Psychology: It deals with behaviour modification. Members of society found with abnormal behaviour such as aggression, frustration, selfishness, self-centredness arrogance, self-assertion etc are referred to clinical psychologists for behaviour therapy and others form of psychological interventions.

6. **Organisational Psychology:** Which deals with industrial and organisational harmony and tranquillity, principles of psychology that deals with psychotherapy and other forms of behaviour modification should be applied on personnel found to have mental, social and other forms of psychological disorder.

References

- Academic staff union of universities (2020) and the Federal Government of Nigeria. Premium Times Newspaper.
- Baker, T.E (2011). *Effective Police Leadership: moving beyond management* USA. Looseheat law publications. Inc.
- Barlow D.H & Durand, V.M (2002). *Abnormal psychology and modern life* (Ninth Edition) Harper Collins Publisher.
- Borisoff, victor, D.A (1998) *Conflict management: A communication SkillsApproach*. Needham Heights; allyn & Balon, A Viacom Company
- Cloke, K., Goldsmith, J (2011). *Resolving Conflict at work, ten strategies for everyone on the job* (3rd Edition) San Franscisco Jossey Bass.
- Conflict Sensitivity Consortium (2021). *How to guide to conflict sensitivity*. London: conflict sensitivity consortium.
- De-Janasz, S. Dowd, K.O.X Schneider. B.Z (2009) *Interpersonal skills in organization*: Boston: M Graw-Hill.
- Diez, T., Stetter, S. & Albert, M. (2006). The European Union and border conflicts: the transformative power of integration international organization, 60 (3).
- Doherty, N.X Guyler, M. (2008). *The essential guide to work place mediation and conflict resolution rebuilding workplace relationships*. London: Kogan Page.
- Dronson, E; Wilson, T.D; Akert, R. M (1997) *social psychology* (Second edition). Longman, New York.
- Emeka O. (2005). *Organizational and industrial psychology*. Idika press (Nig)
- Farrant, S.S (1980). *Principles and practice of Education*: Longman Group UK Limited
- Hocker, J. X Wilmot W. (2013) *Interpersonal Conflict*, 9th ed McGraw Hill, Higher, Education.
- Kinicki, A.X Kreithener, R. (2008). *Organizational Behaviour key concepts, skills and best practices*. New York; The McGraw-Hill Companies.

- Korchin, S.J (2024) Modern clinical psychology: principles of intervention in the clinical and community: CBS publisher and distributors put. Ltd new Delhi India Kazdhi, A.E (1989). Behavior modification in Applied setting fourth edition. Brooks/code publishing company.
- Madiy, Y. and Shazia, K. (2015). Conflict management styles. A Study of Organizational politics among professionals. Journal of Political studies 22 (2).
- Moton, K.I (2004) Community psychology. Elsevier INC. USA.
- Obi, R. (2012) Stress and conflict in organization. In Ogunbameru O.A (ed). Industrial sociology. Ibadan, spectrum Book Ltd.
- Omisore and Abiodun (2014) "Organizational Conflict causes, effect and remedies" international journal of Academic research in economics and management sciences: Nov. 2014 Vol.3 No: ISSN 2226-36
- Oucho, J.O (2002). Undercurrents of ethnic conflict in kenya. Netherland: Koninklijke Brill.
- Reich, S.M; Riemer, M; PrilleHensky, I; Montero, M (2007). International Community psychology, History and Theories; Springer Science + Business Media, LLC New York.
- Robbins, S.P (2001). Organizational behavior 9th edition. New York: prenticer Hall.
- Robbins, S.P (2005). Organizational behavior (11th ed). New jersey: pearson Education, Inc.
- Shonk, K. (2024). The New Conflict management
- Taripanyeofori, M.C & Roseline, M.B (2020). Conflict and its management in An Organization: A Theoretical Review. Internationals Journal of Scientific and Research Publications, Volume 10, Issue. 5
- Tidwell, A.C (1998). Conflict Resolved? A Critical Assess of Conflict Resolution, New York.
- Tschannen-M (2001). The effects of a state wide conflict management initiative in organization in American secondary Education, 29(1), 3.
- Wrightsmann, L.S (1977) Social psychology (Second edition) Wadsworth publishing Company USA

Chapter 8

Sociological Reflections on Conflict Resolution

Halima Sarkinfada

Introduction

Although conflict has always been central to sociological reflections and analysis, it is generally labelled to sociological writings of opponents to the dominance of structural functionalism in the two decades after the Second World War (Ogunbameru, 2006). Conflicts theory agrees that the existence of groups with different interests does not mean that they will be in conflict all the time. Sociologically, there may be periods of truce or it may be that some social groups are persuaded that their interests are not different from those of other groups. Nevertheless, periods of harmony do not last for ever, eventually, conflict, will return (Halarambos & Holborn, 2008) Conflict is a ubiquitous aspect of human society, occurring in various forms, from interpersonal disagreements to large-scale social and political disputes among groups and the society at large. Far from being purely negative, conflict is not necessarily a negative aspect of society since it produces social change, conflict serves as a vital force for change, exposing societal flaws, inequality, challenging power dynamics, and driving reform. Conflict resolution, therefore, is not just about restoring peace but involves navigating complex social dynamics to achieve constructive and structural outcomes (Sarkinfada, 2020). This paper offers a comprehensive sociological reflection on conflict resolution, examining how sociological theories inform our understanding of conflict and shape practical approaches to resolving it in all dimensions.

Sociological perspectives provide valuable frameworks for analyzing the causes, processes, and resolutions of conflict. Structural Functionalism, see the society as relatively integrated whole which tends to seek relative stability as most aspect of the society contributes to well being and survival which propels the society to rest on the consensus of its members, Sarkinfada (2020) posits that conflict theory assumes that the society experiences inconsistencies and conflict everywhere seeing that the society is continually subject to change which coincide with the constraint and coercion of some members by others, and Symbolic Interactionism offers peoples interpretations of symbols base on the meanings they learn from others, people base their interaction on their interpretations of symbols. Symbols permit people to have internal conversations, thus they can gear their interaction to behaviour that they think others aspects from them and the behaviour they expect from others. All three perspectives offer distinct but complementary insights into the nature of conflict. By examining these theories shows a reflection of conflict resolution as an approach emphasizing the role competition and

constraint within the society. The paper aims to provide a holistic understanding of conflict resolution as a process deeply embedded in social structures, cultural norms, and power relations as it affects social interactions (Sarkinfada, 2020).

Understanding Conflict as a Sociological Phenomenon

Conflict is a multifaceted social phenomenon that emerges from the social interactions, relationships, and social structures that define human societies. Conflicts arise from competing interests, values, quest for power and achieving goals, often exacerbated by social inequalities, power imbalances, and communication breakdowns (Sarkinfada, 2017). The perspective of conflicts lies in its more realistic approach of recognizing the inevitable conflict amongst the classes and any other social relation that based on the hierarchical power structures. Inevitably, those in power will exploit those with little or no power, resulting in an unequal set of statuses and roles. Despite the negative realities of power structures, it is this conflict that is seen as a catalyst of growth and eventual social change. By acknowledging their collective powerlessness under classical Marxist Analysis, together the powerless will seek out against their oppressor and lead to changes in policy. Unlike philosophical and psychological approaches that focus on nature of existence and individual motivations, sociological perspectives emphasize the broader social context in which conflicts occur, such as the roles of social norms, interest, institutions, and cultural narratives in which values and ideas are seen as weapons used by different groups to advance their ends.

The Nature of Conflict

Conflict is in-built in man's reasoning and is an intrinsic part of social life, and is often inevitable, reflecting the diverse and often conflicting interests of individuals and groups. Conflicts theory emphasizes the importance interest over norms and value, and the ways in which the pursuit of interest generated various types of conflict as normal aspects of social life than abnormal or dysfunctional occurrence (Marshall, 1998). The various conflict perspectives within sociology have a model of society as a whole and all adopt a structural approach (Halarambos & Holborn, 2008). All conflict perspectives have the notion that there are groups in the society that have different interest, and because of the existence of different interest there is potential of likelihood of conflict in different groups pursuing their separate interest are likely to clash and produce some degree of instability in the society. Sarkinfada (2017) argues that conflict serves multiple functions in society, including reinforcing group boundaries, clarifying social norms, and promoting social change. For instance, community disputes often surface hidden tensions and grievances that need to be addressed, validating the view that conflict can serve both constructive and destructive roles. Observations of community conflict resolution reveal that conflicts often act as

catalysts for bringing suppressed issues to light, thereby creating opportunities for dialogue and change.

Sociological Theories of Conflict

Three major sociological theories such as Structural Functionalism, Conflict Theory, and Symbolic Interactionism provide valuable insights into the dynamics of conflict and inform strategies for its resolution. Each theory offers a unique lens to understand the causes and consequences of conflict, as well as methods for addressing it.

Structural Functionalism Perspective

Structural Functionalism, founded by Auguste Comte and advanced by Talcott Parsons and Robert Merton, views society as a complex system of interdependent parts that work together to maintain stability and order (Parsons, 1951). From this perspective, conflict is often seen as a disruption to the equilibrium of society that needs to be managed to restore harmony. Even as all parts work conscientiously to achieve a complete whole. However, conflict can also play a functional role by highlighting systemic issues and prompting necessary adjustments for social change in the society (Dahrendorf, 1959).

Conflict as a Disruptive and Adaptive Force

In Structural Functionalism, conflict is frequently perceived as a negative force threatening social order and social consensus. Institutions such as the legal system, educational bodies, and family structures play crucial roles in mediating conflicts and reinforcing societal norms. For example, conflicts within educational settings, such as disagreements between teachers and students over disciplinary actions, reveal how institutional norms can clash with individual needs and aspiration. These observations underscore that institutions are both sources of and solutions to conflicts, as they work to re-establish stability and social norms.

Functionalists acknowledge that while conflict is disruptive, it also has adaptive functions helping societies to adjust and evolve. In this context, conflicts serve as feedback mechanisms, alerting society to areas that need reform or adjustment. For instance, workplace conflicts can lead to policy changes and administrative advocacy that improve employee relations and organizational efficiency, demonstrating how conflict acts as an adaptive force in complex social systems in fostering new renovations and compulsory revolutions.

Determinants or Sources of Conflicts

Several issues are often linked to the source of Interpersonal/Inter-group conflicts. Ogunbameru, (2006) argued that conflicts in societies depend on three (3) major issues, which are:

- I. Power differentials: This expresses that the inability of people to have equal power can ultimately give some the opportunities to exploit others thereby resulting to conflicts in the groups or society.
- II. Scarce Resources: This implies that all the material and non-material resources that people attached great value and importance to are limited in supply, that is limited in supply provoke competitions and struggle between or among people which eventually generate fight over distribution process, patterns and portions.
- III. Different Interest groups: This means that people have divergent goals that often lead to conflicts. Conflicts is likely to occur as each persons/groups tries to pursue its interest.

Mechanisms of Conflict Resolution

Conflict resolution within the Structural Functionalist framework involves restoring balance through established mechanisms such as mediation, negotiation, and institutional reforms. Structured negotiation processes, such as collective bargaining in industrial disputes, help parties reach agreements that align with broader organizational or societal goals. Observations from such processes reveal that while functionalist methods are effective in restoring immediate stability, they may fail to address deeper structural issues that generate conflict in the first place.

Case Study: Industrial Conflicts and Collective Bargaining

Collective bargaining serves as a practical application of Structural Functionalism in conflict resolution. For example, in industrial settings, negotiation processes between labor unions and employers are structured to reach compromises that maintain economic stability and workplace harmony. Observations from such bargaining sessions highlight how these negotiations function to keep the industrial system working smoothly, ensuring that disputes do not disrupt productivity for extended periods.

However, while these mechanisms are effective at restoring balance, they often prioritize short-term stability over long-term systemic change. Critics argue that collective bargaining, while useful, often stops short of addressing the broader economic inequalities and power imbalances that underpin many labor disputes, thus perpetuating a cycle of recurring conflicts.

Conflict Theory Perspective

Conflict Theory, rooted in the works of Karl Marx and later developed by Max Weber, Lewis Coser, and Ralf Dahrendorf, views conflict as a fundamental and inevitable aspect of social life driven by power struggles, competition, and inequality (Marx & Engels, 1848). Conflict Theory posits that conflict is a constant feature of societies structured by unequal access to resources and power, challenging the view that social stability is the natural state of society.

Conflict as a Catalyst for Social Change

According to Conflict Theory, societal conflicts are often rooted in economic disparities, class struggles, and the unequal distribution of power. Observations of social movements, such as labor protests or civil rights marches, highlight how conflicts are used to challenge and renegotiate power dynamics. The civil rights movement in the United States, for instance, used conflict—through protests, legal challenges, and civil disobedience—to confront systemic racism and force significant legal and social transformations.

Conflict Theory emphasizes that these conflicts are not mere disruptions but are essential for societal progress. They expose injustices and drive reforms that realign power structures in more equitable ways. Observations from grassroots movements and community activism consistently show that conflicts often serve as the impetus for legislative changes, policy reforms, and shifts in public attitudes, highlighting the transformative potential of conflict when channeled effectively.

Conflicts Resolution Process: However, the discussion and analysis of conflict resolution approach is specifically extended below. This does not necessarily mean that it is better than the conflict settlement and conflict transformation,

Two Broad Methods of Conflict and Dispute Resolution

The Regular Dispute Resolution (RDR) and Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) are two (2) major methods by which conflict and dispute are resolved between/among individuals, families, communities, countries and regions. Aside from these major methods of conflict resolution, Pruitt Dean and Kim Hee (2004) identified *contending*, *yielding*, *problem-solving* and *avoiding* as the four (4) strategies for conflict resolution. The usage of any of these four strategies alone is not likely to be adequate measure for resolving conflict, except if two or more strategies are combined. The combination is expected to be sequential and it needs to be determined by the nature of the conflict and the parties involved. For example, “contending” strategy may be followed by “yielding”, then by “problem-solving” and finally by “avoiding” strategy.

Contending is the process of trying to impose one's preferred solution on the other party.

Yielding is the process of lowering down, one's own aspirations and settling for less than, one would have liked.

Problem-solving is the process of pursuing, an alternative that satisfies the aspirations of both sides.

Avoiding is the process of not engaging in the conflict. This strategy is divided into two (2) forms, which are inaction and withdrawal. The former means that each party does nothing about the conflict, especially by waiting to hear the response of the other party. The latter means that each party abandons the conflict, especially by walking away/out

The two major classes or methods of resolving conflicts that dominated contemporary debates are discussed below.

Regular Dispute Resolution (RDR)

The RDR method is a formal process by which disputes and conflicts are treated and resolved. It involves the application of law enforcement, such as police and justice system, like the courts and prisons. Basically, RDR entails litigation, wherein a trial will be conducted by a jury or judge, who decides winner and loser of the case during court hearing and adjudication. The process starts from the point, where one of the aggrieved or conflicting parties makes complain to the authority, especially police. The police will in turn interrogate the complainant (plaintiff) and take down his/her statement word by word. After this, a warrant of arrest will be issued against the second party (defendant), who will also be interrogated before charging the case to court, if the two parties could not reconcile. In sum, this method involves the regular system of reporting a case to the police, getting the offender prosecuted, convicted and sentenced. It also covers civil litigations in court, through legal process. Under this system, there is always a winner and a loser, and the winner takes it all. The method is also called *traditional method of dispute and conflict resolution* (Sarkinfada, 2022).

Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR)

The ADR method is a system by which issues are permanently settled without the use of litigation. As it implies, it contains several methods that are alternative to the regular system, i.e, RDR method. The ADR creates an opportunity to people to go for a win-win solution, as against a win-lose or lose-lose situation that characterises RDR. There are different types of ADR, but the major types are:

(I) *Negotiation*

(II) *Mediation*

(III) *Arbitration*

Negotiation

This is a process of settling conflict or disputes or differences between aggrieved parties without the intervention of any third party. It involves discussion or communication between conflicting parties, who seek to find a lasting solution to the existing conflict between them. This technique of conflict resolution could either be applied directly, when the conflicting parties have a face-to-face communication, or indirectly, when each of the two conflicting parties is being represented by his/her attorney. At times, the communication in negotiation is governed by pre-established procedures between the aggrieved parties or their representatives. The warring parties come to the realisation that they each have a problem and both are aware that by talking to each other, a solution to the problem could be found. As such, negotiation is regarded as the best under ADR, because it does not involve third party and it is cost-effective.

Mediation

Mediation, is a practice, where an impartial person (intervener) initiates and promotes peaceful reconciliation between aggrieved parties. It is a process, where a third party facilitates permanent termination of conflicts and attainment of mutually acceptable agreement between people or communities with divergent interests. This settlement process requires a neutral third party initiates the process of helping parties in conflict to achieve a lasting solution to their disputes. Miller (2003, p. 23) sees mediation as “voluntary, informal, nonbinding process undertaken by an external party that fosters these moments of differences or demands between directly invested parties.

Arbitration:

Arbitration is a process whereby a neutral person (Body/Panel) adjudicates or passes a judgment on divergent interest or among people. The judgement passed could be either binding or nonbinding on the concerned persons. This method allows the third party or parties to take position by pronouncing one aggrieved party as winner and the other aggrieved party as a loser. It involves submission of contending issues to an impactful body to decide or recommend way out which could be favourable or unfavourable to either of the aggrieved party. The arbitrator is nominated or approved by the conflicting parties to adjudicate on their differences. Often any resolution passed by arbitration is enforceable by a court of law although the procedure in arbitration is different from the usual court process.

Further Suggestions on Conflict Resolutions

Conflict Theory advocates for systemic change rather than temporary resolutions. Conflict resolution strategies within this framework often involve confrontational approaches such as advocacy, protest, and policy engagement aimed at challenging and altering power dynamics. Observations from recent social justice movements reveal that these methods not only address immediate grievances but also strive to dismantle entrenched systems of inequality. Unlike Structural Functionalism, which seeks to manage conflict within existing structures, Conflict Theory calls for transformative approaches that address the root causes of conflict, such as wealth inequality, political disenfranchisement, and social exclusion. For example, labour strikes and worker-led negotiations often aim to not just resolve specific disputes but to restructure labour relations in ways that give workers more control and fairer wages.

Case Study: The Civil Rights Advocates

The Civil Rights exemplifies Conflict Theory's approach to conflict resolution. Through direct action, legal challenges, and widespread mobilization, the movement effectively confronted the systemic inequalities of racial segregation and discrimination. Observations of these tactics demonstrate how conflict was strategically used to force significant changes in laws and social norms, making the case for conflict as a necessary component of social justice efforts. This movement's impact underscores Conflict Theory's assertion that meaningful conflict resolution requires addressing the structural roots of inequality, not just surface-level symptoms. By engaging in sustained and organized conflict, the Civil Rights Movement reshaped societal power dynamics and set a precedent for future social movements.

Symbolic Interactionism Perspective

Symbolic Interactionism, developed by George Herbert Mead and Herbert Blumer, offers a micro-level analysis of conflict by focusing on the meanings, symbols, and interactions that shape human behaviour (Mead, 1934; Blumer, 1969). Unlike macro-level theories, Symbolic Interactionism emphasizes the subjective nature of conflict, arguing that disputes arise from differences in perception, communication, and interpretation of social cues.

Conflict as a Social Construct

From the Symbolic Interactionist perspective, conflicts are not just about objective disagreements but are socially constructed through interactions. Everyday conflicts, such as those in family or work settings, often arise from misunderstandings or differing interpretations of social signals. For example, a

disagreement between co-workers over task allocation may escalate due to misinterpretations of intentions, reflecting how conflicts are shaped by personal perceptions rather than objective facts. Observations of conflict in close-knit settings, such as families or small work groups, reveal that these disputes are often rooted in deeper emotional or symbolic issues rather than the surface disagreement. Conflicts become a means through which individuals negotiate their identities, roles, and relationships, highlighting the need for conflict resolution strategies that address the underlying symbolic and emotional dimensions.

Case Study: Restorative Justice in Educational Settings

Restorative justice in educational settings provides a practical illustration of Symbolic Interactionism in conflict resolution. Schools using restorative practices, such as circle processes and facilitated dialogues, aim to repair harm and rebuild relationships rather than simply punishing offenders. Observational studies show that these methods reduce disciplinary issues, enhance student engagement, and create a more supportive school environment by emphasizing empathy and shared understanding.

This approach aligns with Symbolic Interactionism's focus on meaning-making and highlights how conflicts, when addressed through open communication and mutual respect, can lead to positive changes in behavior and relationships. The success of restorative practices in schools underscores the importance of addressing the symbolic dimensions of conflict to achieve sustainable resolutions.

Integrating Sociological Insights and Observations in Conflict Resolution

The integration of sociological insights and empirical observations into conflict resolution practices enhances our understanding of conflict as a complex, multifaceted phenomenon. Observations from diverse settings, including community disputes, social movements, and educational environments, reveal common themes that inform effective conflict resolution strategies.

Enhancing Communication and Understanding

Effective communication is central to conflict resolution, particularly within the Symbolic Interactionist framework. Observations from mediation sessions, family therapy, and restorative justice practices consistently highlight the importance of creating spaces for open dialogue and active listening. By facilitating communication, conflict resolution processes can help parties move beyond entrenched positions and toward mutual understanding and compromise.

Cultural Sensitivity in Conflict Resolution

Conflicts are often deeply embedded in cultural contexts, making cultural sensitivity crucial in conflict resolution. Approaches must be tailored to respect cultural norms, values, and traditions. Observations from indigenous dispute resolution practices reveal that culturally grounded approaches, such as restorative justice, are more effective in promoting reconciliation and long-term peace within communities. Recognizing the cultural dimensions of conflict allows for more effective and contextually appropriate resolution strategies (Braithwaite, 2002).

Promoting Social Justice Through Conflict Resolution

Conflict resolution should not only aim at ending disputes but also promote social justice by addressing the underlying causes of conflict, such as inequality, discrimination, and marginalization. Observations of truth and reconciliation commissions in South Africa and Canada reveal how conflict resolution can contribute to healing and societal transformation by addressing historical grievances and promoting reparative measures. Such approaches emphasize the need to redress past wrongs and build a more equitable society (Hamber, 1998).

Conclusion

Conflict is an inherent aspect of human society, reflecting the diverse and often competing interests of individuals and groups. From a sociological perspective, conflict is not merely a disruption but a dynamic process that can lead to social change, adaptation, or transformation. By examining conflict through the lenses of Structural Functionalism, Conflict Theory, and Symbolic Interactionism, this chapter provides a comprehensive understanding of the complex nature of conflict and its resolution. Effective conflict resolution requires more than just managing disputes; it involves addressing the social structures, power dynamics, and cultural contexts that shape conflicts. Observational insights, combined with theoretical perspectives, Ultimately, conflict resolution is not just about achieving peace but about fostering a more just and inclusive society. By integrating sociological insights and grounded observations into conflict resolution practices, will pave way for strategies that are viable and practical that would resolve disputes and also contribute to social transformation and the promotion of social justice.

References

- Blumer, H. (1969). *Society as Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method*. In ROSE, A. (ed) *Human Behaviour and Social Processes*. Routledge & Kegan Paul. London.
- Braithwaite, J. (2002). *Restorative Justice and Responsive Regulation*. Oxford University Press.
- Collins, R. (1982). *Conflict Sociology: Sociological Insight. An Introduction of Non Obvious Sociology*. Oxford University Press New York.
- Dahrendorf, R. (1959). *Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society*. Stanford University Press.
- Goffman, E. (1959). *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Doubleday Anchor, New York.
- Hamber, B. (1998). *The Burden of Truth: Dealing with the Past in Northern Ireland and South Africa*. INCORE.
- Haralambos M. & Holborn M. , (2008) *Sociology: Themes and Perspectives* 7th edition published by Harper Collins Limited 77-85 Fulham Palace Road. Hammersmith London
- Marx, K., & Engels, F. (1848). *The Communist Manifesto*. Progress Publishers.
- Mead, G. H. (1934). *Mind, Self, and Society*. University of Chicago Press.
- Meighan, R & Siraj-Blatchford, I. (2003). *A Sociology of Educating*, London, Continuum press.
- Miller, B. (19910). *Teaching and Learning in the Multi-grade Classroom: Student Performance and Instructional Routines* South Africa, Copler Publications.
- Parsons, T. (1951). *The Social System*. Free Press.
- Sarkinfada H (2017). Stakeholders' perception of contribution women centres for continuing Education to socio-economic development of Graduates in North-west, Nigeria Unpublished Ph D thesis University of Ilorin Nigeria
- Sarkinfada H (2019). Stakeholders' Perception Of Contribution Of Graduates of Women Centre For Continue Education To Economic And Political

Development In Northwest Nigeria British Journal of Education .7, (3), pp.36-45, March 2019 European Centre for Research Training and Development UK .

Sarkinfada, H. (2020) Perception of Stakeholders' on Empowering Women for Socio-economic development in an Enduring Democracy in Northwest Nigeria. *European Journal for Training and Development Studies* 7, (.2), 1-14, February 2020 European Centre for Research Training and Development UK Indexed in Google Scholar,

Ogunbameru, O. A. (2006). *Sociological Theory, Sociological Imaginations* Spectrum Books Limited.

Sarkinfada. (2022). Assessment of Factors Influencing Women in Attending Higher Institutions in Sokoto State, Nigeria: Implications Sociology of Education. *Asian Journal of Advanced Research and Reports*, 16(9), 27-35.

Smelser, N. J. (1963). *Theory of Collective Behavior*. Free Press.

Tilly, C. (1978). *From Mobilization to Revolution*. Addison-Wesley.

Turner, J. H. (2012). *Theoretical Sociology: 1830 to the Present*. SAGE Publications.