THE ROLE OF LEADERSHIP IN CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN CAMEROON

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The Role of Leadership in Conflict Management in Cameroon

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Crossref

Abstract

Purpose: The study sought to analyze the role of leadership in conflict management in Cameroon

Materials and Methods: The study adopted a desktop methodology. Desk research refers to secondary data or that which can be collected without fieldwork. Desk research is basically involved in collecting data from existing resources hence it is often considered a low cost technique as compared to field research, as the main cost is involved in executive's time, telephone charges and directories. Thus, the study relied on already published studies, reports and statistics. This secondary data was easily accessed through the online journals and library.

Findings: The results show that leadership plays a critical role in conflict management, as leaders are responsible for setting the tone of the country. Leadership influences how conflicts are addressed, either through direct intervention or by simply setting an example for others to follow. Leadership plays a vital role in conflict management in Cameroon. Effective leadership can help to reduce conflicts and promote peace and stability in the country. However, there are several challenges to effective leadership in Cameroon such as a lack of training and capacity building, and a lack of accountability and transparency of leaders.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Practices and Policies: The contingency theory and behavioral theory may be used to anchor future studies in the conflict management sector. The study results will also benefit other stakeholders such as the policy makers as well as researchers and scholars from different parts of the world. The top management of conflict management sector in the country will also use the study findings to improve leadership performance in all their activities and programs. The study recommends that the adoption of effective conflict management policies in the leadership sector will help to improve efficiency in their major operations and activities.

Keywords: *Leadership, Conflict Management, Cameroon.*

INTRODUCTION

Leadership is the art of influencing people to work together to achieve a common goal. It is the process of directing and motivating individuals or groups of individuals to take action to accomplish a specific goal. Leadership involves inspiring, setting direction and providing guidance. It also involves providing resources, developing relationships and creating an environment of trust and cooperation. Leaders create an atmosphere of trust, accountability and respect (Saeed, 2014). Leadership is about establishing expectations, setting the standard for behavior, and providing guidance to those who are engaged in the conflict. A leader should be able to recognize the signs of conflict and address it before it escalates. Leaders also have a responsibility to create a conflict resolution system, which should include strategies for de-escalation, mediation and arbitration. This system should be communicated clearly to all employees and practiced regularly. Leaders should also provide training and education on conflict resolution skills, so that employees understand how to address conflicts when they arise (Bhaduri, 2019). Leaders use a variety of styles to achieve their goals. Autocratic leadership involves strong direction and control. The leader makes decisions and expects them to be followed without question. This style can be effective in times of crisis or when a quick decision is required. Democratic leadership involves allowing team members to participate in decision-making. This style of leadership encourages collaboration and encourages team members to take ownership of their decisions.

Laissez-faire leadership is a style of leadership that encourages team members to take initiative and make their own decisions without interference from the leader (Anwar, 2017). This style of leadership is often used when team members have expertise in a particular area or when decisions need to be made quickly. Whether at home with our families at work with colleagues or in negotiations between governments, conflict pervades our relationships. Thus, conflict is an inevitable and necessary feature of domestic and international relations. The challenge facing governments is not the elimination of conflict, but rather how to effectively address conflict when it arises. Conflict is contest between people with opposing needs, ideas, beliefs, values or goals. It is present when parties perceive that their interests are incompatible, express hostile attitudes or pursue their interests through actions that may damage the other parties. Conflict management can take different forms such as negotiation, mediation, arbitration and litigation, depending on the context and the types of conflict (Chandolia, 2020). Cameroon is a diverse multicultural country with a history of political and ethnic tensions. This has resulted in a wide range of conflicts, ranging from ethnic disputes between English-speaking and French-speaking populations to political and economic tensions between the central government and regional governments. Leadership plays a crucial role in managing and resolving these conflicts, as leaders are often the ones responsible for setting the tone for how conflicts are handled and how disputes are settled.

Leaders in Cameroon had the opportunity to use a variety of styles to manage conflicts from the more passive accommodation approach to the more active collaboration approach (Annan, 2021). Depending on the particular context, certain styles may be more effective than others. Leaders in Cameroon also had the opportunity to use different leadership styles to manage conflicts. Conflict management is becoming increasingly important in Cameroon and around the world. The ability

to effectively manage and resolve conflicts is a key element of successful organizations, businesses and communities. Leaders facilitated dialogue between individuals and groups, as well as between different stakeholders, in order to identify and address the root causes of the conflict. Leaders also used negotiation and mediation techniques to resolve conflicts in a peaceful manner (Lang, 2019). Leadership helped to promote economic development in Cameroon. Effective leadership help to create a more equitable economy, by addressing economic inequality and poverty. Leaders also create an environment that encourages investment and entrepreneurship, which helped to create jobs and stimulate economic growth (Moinina, 2020). Leadership helped to promote political stability in Cameroon. Leaders promoted accountability and transparency in the government, as well as a respect for the rule of law and human rights.

Statement of the Problem

Leadership plays a vital role in conflict management, especially in developing countries such as Cameroon. Conflict management is an important tool for promoting peace and development in Cameroon as it ensures that differences between individuals and groups are managed in a constructive way. The impact of leadership on conflict management in Cameroon is far-reaching, as it affects all aspects of society, from the economy to political stability. There are several factors that contribute to conflict in Cameroon, such as political and economic instability. Political instability in Cameroon is due to a lack of accountability and transparency in the government, as well as a lack of trust between different political parties and ethnic groups. In addition, there is a lack of rule of law and human rights abuses, which contribute to rising tensions between different groups. Economic instability is also a major factor contributing to conflict in Cameroon. The country has an economy that is largely dependent on the export of raw materials, such as oil and minerals, which creates economic inequality and poverty.

In addition, the country has a large informal sector, which provides employment for many people but is also prone to exploitation. Leaders in the country lack the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively manage and resolve conflicts. This leads to conflicts escalating and becoming more difficult to resolve. Additionally, many leaders in the country are not well-versed in the principles of conflict resolution. This leads to ineffective solutions that may not address the underlying causes of the conflict. Second, there is a lack of resources available to leaders in Cameroon to help them manage and resolve conflicts. This includes a lack of funding and support from the government. This make it difficult for leaders to access the resources they need to implement effective strategies for resolving conflicts. Third, many leaders in Cameroon lack the necessary experience to properly manage conflict. This leads to ineffective strategies and solutions that do not address the root causes of the conflict. Additionally, leaders may not be aware of the different methods and strategies available for addressing and resolving conflicts. Leadership has been a crucial role in enforcing conflicts in Cameroon. Most leaders played a big part in influencing conflicts and wars among the people of Cameroon. Therefore this study intends to bridge the conceptual gap by determining the role of leadership plays in conflict management in Cameroon.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

This study will benefit from the contingency theory which was proposed by Professor Fred Fiedler (1960) and behavioral theory by John B. Watson (1924).

The Contingency Theory

This theory suggests that effective leaders should be able to recognize the different factors that can affect the success of a team or organization and then adjust their approach accordingly. It suggests that effective leaders should be able to identify the key factors that can influence the success of a team or organization and then adjust their strategy to fit those factors. The contingency theory also suggests that effective leaders should be able to identify and address potential sources of conflict before they become an issue (Fiedler, 2015). It recognizes the importance of considering the needs of the employees in an organization, the task to be done and the situation or environment. Failure to do these often times result in ineffective leadership. Researchers have discovered that the most constructive way to manage conflict in an organization is by applying this theory, that is, such management is based on the prevailing circumstances of the conflict itself.

Behavioral Theory

Behavioral theory assumes that you can learn to become a good leader because you are not drawing on personality traits. Your actions or what you do define your leadership ability. This theory urges that leaders should communicate with subordinates more effectively by becoming more aware of their leadership style (Verawati,2020) It is suggested that the Team Style is the ideal leadership behavior Blake and Mouton grid defined Country Club Style. Here the leader has a high concern for others and likes to be involved with them. On the other hand, he or she has a low concern for the task. Usually the emphasis of the leader is to cultivate a high level of friendly relationships with the led group. So although leaders like this appear to care about their people and want to create a comfortable and friendly environment. People feel good and happy, but what they are supposed to do lacks priority. Ironically, the group suffers ultimately because they fail to achieve

Empirical Review

Fossung (2023) determined effective schools that consistently attain equity in quality of students' learning in these sub-divisions and to determine principals' professional abilities to resolve conflicts in these schools. This was done through both a literature study and an empirical investigation. The researcher used a survey research design with data gathering instruments being the questionnaires and interview guides. Conclusions drawn from the study showed that, there were no effective schools in Kumba I, II and III Sub-divisions, but the researcher identified some leading schools in these sub-divisions based on their nearness to the cut-off mean score.

Wainanina (2020) examined the influence of principals' conflict management strategies on conflict resolutions in secondary schools in Murang'a County. The study adopted descriptive research design. Data were collected using questionnaires and interview guides. Data analysis was done through the use of descriptive and inferential statistics. The study established that schools had conflict management techniques. Mediation was commonly used in resolving conflicts between principal and teachers. Conflict management techniques were found to have a positive linearly

significant influence on conflict management strategies. The study concluded that secondary schools had conflict management strategies and mediation was commonly used in resolving conflicts between principal and teachers.

Khalif (2019) investigated effect of community leadership on conflict management in Somalia. The study design was used is descriptive survey. The study used primary data. Data collection methods used included use of questionnaires. From the findings of the regression analysis, the study found that there was a variation of 40.2% on conflict management in Banadir region due to changes in administrative community leadership, enabling community leadership, adaptive community leadership and transformational community leadership. This is an indication that 40.2% changes in conflict management of Banadir region in Mogadishu could be accounted for by administrative community leadership, enabling community leadership, adaptive community leadership and transformational community leadership while the remaining percentage is explained by other factors contained in error terms. The findings of the study established that Banadir region were operating under a highly development environment between them.

Sophie (2018) investigated strategies used by principals for enhancing the productivity of secondary school teachers in selected government secondary schools in Cameroon. Questionnaire was used to collect data from 350 teachers selected from a population of 1400 teachers in government secondary schools in Fako Division of the South West Region of Cameroon. The multi-stage sampling technique was used to select teachers for the study. Results showed that, principals' communication, conflict management, supervisory and motivation strategies influence the productivity of teachers in Government Secondary Schools. Of the fours strategies examined, conflict management strategy was found to have more influence on the productivity of teachers. Principals' strategies have a direct relationship with teachers' productivity.

Grubaugh (2018) examined the relationships among staff nurse perceptions of their nurse manager (NM) leadership ability, conflict management and team backup on medical-surgical units. Secondary analyses were conducted utilizing data previously collected from a sample of 257 staff nurses. A series of multiple regressions, including a mediation model, were estimated to determine relationships among variables. The results showed that positive relationships were substantiated among the variables of NM leadership ability, conflict management, and team backup. Staff nurse perceptions of NM leadership ability were a significant predictor of conflict management and team backup improve on the productivity of teachers.

Hakeem (2018) explored how leadership styles impact work engagement and conflict management practices in Nigerian universities. It utilized a qualitative research design, focusing on 40 semi-structured interviews with senior university management staff comprising Vice-Chancellors, Registrars, Bursars, Deans of Faculties and senior non-teaching staff (i.e. chief librarians) of some selected institutions. The findings revealed cultural values shaping the choice of authoritative, transactional and transformational leadership styles were commonly adopted. Results further indicate how Nigerian academic institutions and processes are considered as being overly bureaucratic and transactional. Additionally, some context-specific norms were found to influence leadership functions impacting work engagement and conflict management practices.

Kofand (2017) investigated the relationship between leadership styles and crisis management in private businesses. A quantitative technique used in order to analyses this study. 130 participants were involved in the present study. The findings revealed that the highest value among all leadership styles was transformational leadership.

Raviender (2016) examined the choice of conflict management strategies made by servant leaders. The study used the method of narrative enquiry within the framework of interpretative phenomenological analysis to capture the life experiences as lived. The study suggested that the servant leaders manifest conflict management styles which are more persuasive, humane and participative. Their chief strategies for resolving subordinate-subordinate conflict are initial diagnosis of the situation; leader's intervention in facilitating an amicable solution and impartiality of the leader while effecting resolution of conflict. Diagnosis of the conflict situation, self-restraint, patience, composure and humility of the servant leader emerged as major leadership characteristics, as well as strategies for dealing with any provocative employee behavior.

Cherutich (2016) investigated the nature, origin and causes of ethnic conflicts in Rongai Sub-county. The study adopted descriptive research design. The primary data was collected using in-depth interviews and focus group discussions while secondary data was obtained from both published and unpublished records, magazines and books. This study had three major findings. First, the ethnic conflicts in Rongai Sub-county were mainly of violent nature, originated from the reintroduction of multi-party politics in Kenya in early 1990s and were caused mainly by land and political issues. Secondly, the institution of elder hood was strong in Rongai Sub-county and commanded respect in the management of ethnic conflicts. Thirdly, the elders were the lead actors in ethnic conflicts management in Rongai Sub-county and played key roles that were aimed at achieving peaceful co-existence among ethnic groups.

Ongwari (2015) did a critical analysis of the role of traditional leaders in mediation, look at their importance in conflict management and propose recommendations that would contribute to strengthening the use of traditional leaders in international conflict management. The research findings were based on broad literature review and were supplemented with focus group discussions, informant interviews and questionnaires. The study established that traditional leaders have continued to be fundamentally involved in mediation of communal conflicts in Africa since most conflicts in Africa are as a result of unequal distribution of resources, widespread corruption and ethnicity. The study acknowledged that traditional leader's role in mediation has been successful in peace processes citing the Borama Conference in Somaliland as an example. Furthermore, the study found out that the role traditional leaders in mediation has not been given enough support and recognition by the international community hence weakening their role in international conflict management.

Anna (2014) investigated the potential sources of conflict in Greek primary schools and to determine appropriate approaches for the handling of conflicts. Anonymous questionnaires were distributed to primary school educators in two Greek regions, one of which was the metropolitan area of Athens, resulting in a sample of 414 completed questionnaires. The results showed that school conflicts often arise in the school and that when school conflicts did occur they were mainly

attributed to both interpersonal and organizational reasons. Moreover, the results showed that there is a greater likelihood for these conflicts to arise in urban schools than in other regions.

Mbiti (2014) assessed the influence of leadership on conflict resolution strategies used in secondary school infrastructural projects in Kitui Central District, Kitui County, Kenya. A descriptive survey research design utilizing both qualitative and quantitative data analysis approaches was adopted. The study targeted population of 482 who have some role to play in the secondary school infrastructure building projects. The questionnaires were used as the main research instruments. Data were analyzed by both descriptive and inferential statistics. The findings of this study were that there was a strong significant relationship between leadership functions, skills, power and styles.

Sigrit (2013) analyzed the relationship between Thomas-Kilmann's Conflict Management Modes (CMM) and Fiedler's Leadership Style (LS) measures. The authors use a unique dataset of 343 leaders and specialists from different Estonian organizations, on both Thomas-Kilmann's CMM and Fiedler's Least Preferred Co-worker test. The data were analyzed by multivariate methods. The results indicate that leaders who are task-oriented, according to Fiedler's model, tend to use more competing as the dominant CMM, while relationship-oriented leaders are more accommodating. The authors also analyze the effect of individual characteristics, finding that younger managers are more task-oriented while older ones are typically relationship-oriented and conflict avoiding; women are more collaborative and less conflict avoiding and men tend to use the accommodating mode more than women. Surprisingly, women tend to be more competitive.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a desktop methodology. Desk research refers to secondary data or that which can be collected without fieldwork. Desk research is basically involved in collecting data from existing resources hence it is often considered a low cost technique as compared to field research, as the main cost is involved in executive's time, telephone charges and directories. Thus, the study relied on already published studies, reports and statistics. This secondary data was easily accessed through the online journals and library

RESULTS

The results were grouped into various research gap categories namely as conceptual, methodological and geographical gap.

Conceptual Gaps

Studies by Fossung (2023), Wainanina (2020), Khalif (2019), Sophie, Grubaugh and Hakeem (2018), Kofand (2017), Raviender, and Cherutich (2016), Ongwari (2015), Anna and Mbiti (2014) and Sigrit (2013) had conceptual framework gap in addition, all the mentioned studies did not establish the challenges of leadership on conflict management. The studies did not outline the challenges in a clear manner. Therefore, the current study seeks to address these conceptual gaps

Geographical Gap

Studies by Wainanina (2020), Khalif (2019), Grubaugh and Hakeem (2018), Kofand (2017), Raviender, and Cherutich (2016), Ongwari (2015), Anna and Mbiti (2014) and Sigrit (2013) had

geographical gap because they were not conducted in Cameroon. This implies that the results may be inapplicable in Cameroon since the social economic environment of Cameroon and other countries differ. The current study seeks to address this gap.

Methodological Gap

A methodological gap presents itself in this study, Mbiti (2014) assessed the influence of leadership on conflict resolution strategies used in secondary school infrastructural projects in Kitui Central District, Kitui County, Kenya. A descriptive survey research design utilizing both qualitative and quantitative data analysis approaches was adopted data to analyze data while our study will use a desk study literature review methodology.

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

Conflict is still an inevitable factor in life and it happens spontaneously in our daily activities. Differences of opinion or differences between individuals or groups will always exist. In one way or the other, conflict as a part of the human experience can influence our actions or decisions. Conflict should not be viewed only in a negative light but can be seen as an opportunity for growth and learning and lead towards a positive outcome. Conflict is usually avoidable because it can lead to emotions and make the situation uncomfortable. Conflicts is ignited by the feeling of guilt, anger, fear and anxiety which causes people to avoid them all together. The way the conflict is managed will determine whether the result is constructive and beneficial, or unfavorable and destructive. Leaders are trained to lead the change process, development process and the transformation agenda in organizations. Leaders are responsible for using their leadership skills to effectively use conflict management strategies.

Recommendations

Leadership plays an important role in conflict management. Leaders have the ability to create an environment that is conducive to effective conflict resolution. Leaders should set the tone for the organization, create a safe and productive environment, and identify and address underlying causes of conflict. Government is encouraged to continue to embrace openness, dialogue and other multi-dimensional. Leaders must be able to recognize that conflict can cause negative problems in their team or organization. If they are able to recognize their leadership skills and identify, which conflict-handling style is necessary for each situation, they can establish an opportunity to enhance team structure and dynamics and eventually achieve their objective of changing, developing and transforming organizations

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