PSYCHOLOGICAL PREDICTORS OF CONFLICT MANAGEMENT BEHAVIOUR OF LABOUR LEADERS IN LAGOS STATE, NIGERIA

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The study examined the joint and relative effects of emotional intelligence and communication skill on conflict management behaviour of labour leaders in Lagos State, Nigeria. A descriptive survey research design was adopted using questionnaire as the main instrument. 180 respondents (labour leaders) were purposively selected from ten (10) randomly selected industrial unions in Lagos State. Data collected were analysed using multiple regressions at 0.05 alpha levels. The findings indicated significant composite effect of communication skill and emotional intelligence on conflict management behaviour of labour leaders ($R = .458; \text{Adjusted } R^2 = .201 (20.1\%); F_{2,177} = 23.446, P < 0.05$). In addition, the result revealed that communication skill has a stronger significant effect on conflict management behaviour of the respondents ($B = .212, t = 4.747, p <.05$). Based on the findings, it was recommended among other things, that government should organize intervention training programme on the two skills for labour leaders and that labour leaders be encouraged to update themselves educationally in order to enhance their communication skills.

Keywords: emotional intelligence, communication skills, conflict management behaviour, labour leaders.

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Introduction

The problem of conflict and conflict management in work organizations has become an issue of great concern to both the government and employers of labour in the organized private sectors especially in developing countries of the world including Nigeria. This is because despite the operation of the existing machineries (e.g. collective bargaining and statutory machinery) for conflict management in Nigeria, the incidence of industrial conflict is consistently and persistently on the increase (Onyeonoru, 2004; Kester, Samuel and Bankole, 2006; Bankole, 2007).

The incidence of industrial conflict in Nigeria has become so devastating such that the socio-economic and technological development of the nation has been hampered. The inability of the available conflict resolution machineries to nip in the bud the menace of industrial conflict has prompted some industrial relations experts to advocate for better alternative options such as social dialogue, peace education, UNESCO’s peace culture and a host of others (Abu, 1998; Ajala, 2003; Onyeonoru, 2006).

Essentially, conflict as a phenomenon is inevitable in every human grouping. This is largely due to pursuit of diverse and incompatible interests and goals by different individuals that constitute the organization (Edwards, 2000; Otite, 2001; Onyeonoru, 2004). However, some past studies (Hammed and Ayantunji, 2002; Omoluabi, 2001; Akanji, 2005; Mitchell, 2002; Bankole and Kester, 2008) had shown that the outcome of conflict is determined largely by the conflict management behaviour exhibited by the parties involved in conflict.

In essence, the consequence of a conflict can either be functional (positive) or dysfunctional (negative) depending on how the conflict is managed by the conflicting parties. This implies that the conflict management behaviour of the parties in conflict is critical to the outcome of the conflict.

In one of their studies, Hammed & Ayantunji (2002) affirmed that industrial conflict as is found in most organizations today bothers on conflict management behaviour of both labour leaders(appointed or elected) and the management of the organization.

Conflict management behaviour as a concept refers to behavioral orientation that an individual holds towards conflict management. Mitchell (2002) quoting Thomas (1976) identified five conflict management behaviours (styles) based on two conceptually independent dimensions of interpersonal behaviours namely:
assertiveness and co-operativeness. The five identified conflict management behaviours are competing, accommodating, avoiding, collaborating and compromising.

Competing: It depicts a situation in which one has high concern for self and low concern for others. Thus, a person adopting this behaviour pursues his own concern at the expense of others. It is a power oriented behaviour with efforts to force and dominate the other party typically in a ‘win-lose’ fashion.

Accommodating: This is an opposite situation to competing in which a person has high concern for others and low concern for self. This conflict management behaviour involves an element of self sacrifice and is a reflection of low self-esteem.

Avoiding: This has to do with having low concern for self and for others. It is a process where the individual tries to avoid the other person or pretend that the conflict does not exist even when the individual is hurt and angry. This approach does not solve the problem but postpones the evil day. Thus, it leaves the parties feeling more annoyed, resentful and frustrated.

Collaborating: This involves high concern for self and for others hence it is a corollary of the previous style (avoiding). This approach attaches great emphasis on satisfying the concern of all parties, that is, to work with the other party co-operatively in order to find an alternative that integrates and fully satisfies the concern of all. Collaborating is also known as Joint Problem Solving (JPS) approach.

Compromising: It involves finding an expedient, neutrally acceptable solution that partially satisfies both parties. It is an integrative approach to conflict handling.

Though some recent studies had identified some psychological skills such as emotional intelligence, communication skill, assertiveness skill, self-efficacy, critical thinking skill and a host of others that can stimulate positive general behaviour in individuals including conflict management behaviour, not much has been done relating to the specific effects of the skills on conflict management behaviour of labour leaders.

It is on this basis that this study investigated two of the psychological skills specifically emotional intelligence and communication skill as predictors of conflict management behaviour of labour leaders in Lagos State, Nigeria.

The term emotional intelligence is traceable to 1920 when Thorndike (1920) first used the term “Social Intelligence” to describe
the skill of getting along with other people. In 1975, Gardner (1975) in his work “The Shattered Mind” came up with “Multiple Intelligence” in which he identified eight intelligences. However, the precise term of emotional intelligence was evolved by Payne (1985) (Wikipedia, 2007). Though, Salovey and Mayer (1990) later carried out the first in-depth research on the concept which made some people to always refer to them as the originators of the concept. It was Goleman (1998) who eventually popularized the concept through several books and articles he wrote on its application.

Emotional intelligence is defined as the capacity for organizing our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves and for managing emotions well in us and in our relationship (Goleman 1999). Salovey (1990) as cited in Aremu (2007) offered five elements of emotional intelligence namely: self-awareness, self-regulation (mood management), self-motivation, empathy and managing relationship (social skill).

In his view, Aremu (2007) described emotional intelligence as the management of one’s emotions in such a way that those emotions do not constitute nuisance to the individual and the significant others around him. In essence, it is the ability to understand oneself and others as we relate to people and adapt and cope with our surroundings. Dreyfus (1999) asserted that emotional intelligence distinguishes an individual as ‘Star Performer’ and plays an important role in determining which organization will out-perform in the global competition.

In corroboration with the position of Dreyfus (1999), Goleman (1999) declared emphatically that emotional intelligence is a bigger predictor of workplace success than Intelligent Quotient (IQ). Goleman (1999) stressed further that an individuals’ success at work is 80 per cent dependent on emotional intelligence and only 20 percent dependent on IQ. This goes to show that a highly intelligent labour leader may not be able to negotiate well without emotional intelligence that will enable him/her to manage effectively his/her emotion and that of others.

The above argument is supported by the proclamation of Debra and James (1997) that people who lack emotional intelligence especially empathy or the ability to view life from another person’s perspective are more likely to be causes of conflict rather than managers of conflict. Suffice it to say, therefore, that individual and ultimately organizational performance is greatly influenced by the emotional content of individual behavior (Macaleer & Shannon, 2002)
Another skill that has been implicated as far as conflict management behaviour is concerned is communication skill. Communication per se is the total process by which one-person shares and imparts information on people so that both of them clearly understood each other (Johnson, 2001).

As a social being, every man or woman plays many roles in life such as parents, workers, union leaders, friends, boss and many others. It is however, noteworthy that in all these roles, there is one skill that is extensively used all through life and that is communication skill. Perhaps this is why communication skill is considered as a very important aspect of ones personality that helps to build good relationship with others.

However, communication skill has been described as the ability to share knowledge, ideas and feelings effectively with the reception of feedbacks (Johnson, 2001). Southam (2006) put it more succinctly when he described communication skills as comprising literacy, verbal skills and listening skills. This pre-supposes that a good communicator is expected to possess basic skills in writing, speaking, active listening and interpersonal communication.

The inference can be made, therefore, that for a labour leader to negotiate skillfully and manage conflict effectively he/she requires communication skills. This deduction is supported by the report of Trapans & Gettings (1989), which indicated that improved communication skills sustain industrial peace and harmony. Ajala (2003) opined that good communication is one of the key skills to be acquired in peace education for successful conflict resolution.

Bakare (1992) echoed the same view when he posited that male labour leaders tend to exhibit more aggressive behaviour than female due to their lack of communication skills. In a similar study that investigated communication skill and conflict resolution strategy of workers, McDowell (1990) as cited in Akintayo (2005) observed that due to lack of interpersonal communication skill, male negotiator tend to express their opinions forcefully and prefer to assume control or dominate argument. Whereas their female counterparts tend to integrate argument and offer, trade offs to reach agreement.

The objectives of this study are to:

(i) Ascertain the joint effects of emotional intelligence and communication skill on the conflict management behavior of labour leaders.
(ii) Examine the relative effects of emotional intelligence and communication skill on the conflict management behaviour of labour leaders.

**Research Questions**

The research questions generated for the study are:

1. What are the composite effects of emotional intelligence and communication skill on conflict management behaviour of labour leaders?
2. What is the relative contribution of emotional intelligence and communication skill to conflict management behaviour of labour leaders?

**Methodology**

**Research Design:**

A descriptive survey research design was adopted for this study and data were collected through questionnaires.

**Participants**

A sample size of 200 labour leaders was purposively selected, from 10 randomly selected industrial unions that are located in Lagos State. Twenty (20) labour leaders each were selected from the ten (10) selected industrial unions. The sample comprises males and females with the age ranging from 24 to 55 years. 37 of the respondents were females while 163 were males.

**Instrumentation**

A structured questionnaire, divided into four sections (A, B, C & D) was used as the main instrument for the study. Section A contains the demographic data of the respondents such as age, sex, marital status, educational qualification, religion and working experience. Section B contains a 33-item standardized scale on emotional intelligence, developed by Schutte et al (1998). It has a reported validity of 0.78 (Schutte et’ al, 1998). The scale was pilot tested and a reliability coefficient of 0.82 was obtained. Section C contains a 34-item standardized scale on communication skills. The scale was retrieved on Jan 20, 2008 from http://www.psychtests.com/cgi-bin/tests/transfer.cgi. It has a reported alpha coefficient of 0.80 but when, it was pilot tested, it gave a reliability coefficient of 0.75. Section D contains a 15-item scale adapted from the 28-items Rahim’s organization conflict inventory II (ROCI-II). It was developed by Rahim (1983). The scale was used to assess the conflict management behaviour of the respondents. The modified version of the scale was pilot tested on sample of 20 employees within three weeks interval. The test-retest reliability coefficient obtained was 0.75. The four-point response rating scale of
Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2) and Strongly Disagree (1) was adopted for the study.

**Procedure**

The researcher administered the questionnaires with the assistance of the General Secretaries of the selected industrial unions and the Registrar of trade unions who had earlier given to the researcher a letter of introduction addressed to the industrial unions seeking for their assistance and co-operation in the administration of the questionnaires. 200 copies of the questionnaire were distributed, out of which 183 were returned but only 180 copies representing 90 per cent were found valid for analysis.

**Method of Data Analysis**

The data collected through questionnaire were analyzed using simple percentage and frequency count for demographic information about the respondents while multiple regressions was used for the two research questions at 0.05 alpha levels.

**Results**

Two issues were addressed in this study. One of the issues was to know the extent of the joint contribution of emotional intelligence and assertiveness skill to the prediction of conflict management behaviour of labour leaders in Lagos state, Nigeria. The second issue of interest was to find out which of the two independent variables made the greater contribution to the prediction of conflict management behaviour of labour leaders in Lagos state, Nigeria.

The results of the data analysis indicating the composite and relative effects of the independent variables (emotional intelligence and communication skill) on the dependent variable (conflict management behaviour) of labour leaders are shown on Table 1 and Table 2 respectively:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of variation</th>
<th>Sum of squares</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regression</td>
<td>1543.299</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>771.649</td>
<td>23.446</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>Sig.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residual</td>
<td>5825.501</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>32.912</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>7368.800</td>
<td>179</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Significant at $F_{(2,177)} = 23.446; P < 0.05$
The display on Table 1 indicates that the two independent variables (emotional intelligence and communication skill) when put together yielded a coefficient of multiple regression (R) of 0.458 and an adjusted R2= 0.201. This implies that 20.1% of the total variance in conflict management behaviour of the labour leaders is accounted for by the combination of the two variables. The table also reveals that the analysis of variance of the multiple regression data produced F-ratio value of F (2,177) = 23.446; P <0.05) which indicated the effectiveness of the two skills in predicting the dependent variable.

Table 2: Relative contribution of the independent variables to the prediction of conflict-handling behaviour

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>Std Error</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>Rank Order</th>
<th>Sign.</th>
<th>Remark</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication Skill</td>
<td>.212</td>
<td>.045</td>
<td>.346</td>
<td>4.747</td>
<td>1st</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>Sign.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Intelligence</td>
<td>.105</td>
<td>.040</td>
<td>.192</td>
<td>2.628</td>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>.009</td>
<td>Sign.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Significant at P < 0.05

Table 2 above shows that each of the independent variables (communication skill and emotional intelligence) made significant individual contributions to the prediction of conflict management behaviour of labour leaders. Communication skill has a relative significant effect of (B= .212; t = 4.747, P < 0.05) while emotional intelligence has a separate significant effect of (B= .1058, t = 2.628, P < 0.05). Though the two variables made significant relative contribution to the prediction of conflict management behaviour of the respondents, the result indicates that communication skill is a more potent predictor of the criterion variable.

**Discussion of Findings**

The results obtained from the multiple regression analysis of the Research Question One indicated that communication skill and emotional intelligence either collectively or individually are potent predictors of conflict management behaviour of labour leaders. Both variables made significant contributions of about 20.1% to the prediction of conflict management behaviour of the respondents.

The joint contribution could not have come by chance because the F –ratio value of 23.446 lends credence to the effectiveness of the two skills in predicting conflict management behaviour among the participants. The outcome of this research question thus confirmed
the submissions of Debra & James (1997); Hammed (1999), Johnson (2001); Hammed & Ayantunji (2002); Southam (2006) and Aremu (2007) that communication skill and emotional intelligence are part of the 21st century generic skills that every organization and individual workers need to handle conflict and to survive in the face of complexities facing the world of work.

In addition, the result of survey conducted by the University of Pittsburgh’s Katz Business School synchronized the findings of this present study as it reported that communication skill and emotional intelligence are the main factors contributing to job success (MindTools.Com, 2007)

As for the extent to which each of the two independent variables contributed to the prediction of conflict management behaviour, it could be deduced from Table 2 that communication skill is a better predictor of conflict management behaviour among the participants because it has relative significant effect of ($B = .212; t = 4.747, p < 0.05$) as against emotional intelligence that has ($B = .105, t = 2.628, p < 0.05$).

This result is not surprising because communication skill is the primary skill through which other skills are actualized or expressed. Without communication skill, other skills may remain passive and dormant. Johnson (2001) and Southam (2006) pointed out in their studies that human beings have many roles to play in life but that in all the roles, communication skill takes a central position. Perhaps this explains why communication skill is considered as a paramount aspect of one’s personality that helps to build good interpersonal relationship necessary for effective conflict management. Ajala (2003) equally confirmed that communication skill is one of the key skills required for successful conflict resolution. The significant relative effect of emotional intelligence on conflict management behaviour as reflected in Table 2 is equally not unexpected. This is because by the nature of the construct of emotional intelligence, it is expected that the understanding of one’s and other people’s emotions, and one’s ability to regulate and manage them will enable one to manage conflict effectively.

The result of the present study is also in line with the study of Bankole and Kester (2008) that an emotionally intelligent person has the tendency to empathise with the other party in conflict and thus employ a Joint Problem Solving (JPS) approach that leads to win-win situation in which the interest of both parties in conflict is satisfied. JPS according to Albert (2000) is the situation in which parties to a conflict, either by themselves or through the assistance of a third
party, find participatory solutions to their problems in a cordial environment and through a non-judgemental and highly participatory procedure. Thus, joint problem solving promotes cooperation between the conflicting parties who jointly analyse the structure of the conflict and carefully work out strategies for reconciliation between them.

The finding of this study conformed to the result of Adeyemo & Ogunyemi (2007) that an objective measure of emotion management skills is associated with a tendency to maintain an experimentally induced positive mood, which has obvious implications for effective conflict management behaviour.

The studies of Debra & James (1997), Shute et al (1998), Yu et al (2006), Aremu (2007), Animashaun (2007), Bankole & Kester (2008) and Fajana (2009) also supported the result of the present study that emotional intelligence is potent in regulating moods of people in a positive direction that can engender effective conflict management behaviour.

Conclusion and Recommendations

From the findings of this study, it is obvious that the two psychological factors- communication skill and emotional intelligence have significant influence on the conflict management behaviour of labour leaders. Thus, it is recommended that training on the two skills be introduced by government as intervention strategies to enhance the conflict management behaviour of labour leaders in all work organizations.

In addition, there is urgent need to expand the curriculum of the Michael Imoudu Institute for labour studies to include contents on communication skill and emotional intelligence since the two skills are found to be strong predictors of labour leaders’ conflict management behaviour. With the understanding that low literacy level of labour leaders is one of the factors responsible for the inadequacies observed in their communication skill, it is suggested that employers of labour should encourage labour leaders to update themselves educationally by subsidizing their tuition fees and/or granting them study leave with pay.
REFERENCES


the Annual meeting of the International Communication


