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TOPIC:

**EXPLORING THE ROLE OF DIPLOMACY IN THE
GENERATION AND THE RESOLUTION OF
CONFLICT**

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INTRODUCTION

The subject matter of this discourse is exploratory, in order words, we are to probe and evaluate the feasibility of the application of diplomatic techniques to the resolution of what one imagined to be both societal and organisational conflict. Nevertheless, we proceed to traverse organisations to identify conflicts that required resolutions through the diplomatic practices. How can we establish that conflict exists in both the society and organizations? What are the definitive indicators of conflict? What does diplomacy have to do with conflict in organisations? These questions would serve as the compass for us as we explore the generation and the resolutions of conflicts using the tools of diplomacy in this discourse.

Conflict has been known to be part of human nature, since Adam rebelled against the creator by *disagreeing* to stick to the instructions handed down to him. Man then developed certain attitudes and aptitudes, in particular, greed, which predisposes him to disagreements, divergent views from the agreed one (conflict) most of the time hence precipitating conflict. It is presupposed that man is conflict personified, he carry this with him into organisations.

As man formed a society, conflict became established as the major dynamics in the society. It was against this background that Charles H. Cooley opined that conflict, of some sort, was the life of society and progress emerges from the struggle in which individual, class, or institution sought to realize its own good idea (Coser, 1956). When people work together, conflict becomes a part of doing business-it's a normal occurrence. Elton Mayo an industrial sociologist pointed to the inevitability of conflict in every organised formal setting when he stated that '*conflict is a 'social disease' and the promotion of equilibrium or a state of collaboration* (defined as social health) is the business of man in the society. How does conflict become endemic in human society?

In every organized life, 'organization' becomes inevitable. Organisation is an indispensable structural requirement for the attainment of collective life and progress. Man in society is an organisation man. This means that though we are free being, nevertheless we are everywhere enclosed in one organisation or the other, formal and informal. This was perhaps the reason why Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) one of the modern political theorists said 'that man is born free but everywhere in chains' in this context the rules (are the chains) of the various organisations in the society, is what holds the society together (family, school or colleges, work place). All these organizations have rules to which man is subjected. We can then say that managing organizations is mitigating conflict with rules, norms and values in order to achieve set goals.

We shall be looking at conflict at two levels of analysis; (i) Nigerian society and (ii) Organizational conflict for example, trade disputes. We shall then evaluate the feasibility of the application of diplomatic tools for their management in order to attain continuous understanding hence peaceful interactions in the society and organisations to which we are subjected. This shall be the main concern of this study.

Conceptions: Conflict and Diplomacy

At this point, we can describe conflict as disagreements, struggles for something that have value to different people. It is also the pursuit of divergent interests, goals and aspirations by individuals and groups in a defined social and physical environment (Otitte, 2001).

Yunusa and Adeoye (2005), conflict involves the struggle, competition, rivalry for objects to which individuals and groups attach value. Lewis Coser averred that it occurs when two or more people engage in a struggle over values and claims to status, power and resources in which the aim of the opponents are to neutralize, injure or eliminate their rivals (1965).

Talcot Parson viewed conflict as having primarily disruptive, dissociating and dysfunctional consequences. It is a disease. In a modern industrial type of society, conflict is endemic. Elton Mayo described it as a 'social disease' and the promotion of 'equilibrium' or a 'state of collaboration' as a state of social health.

It is instructive to note that the preceding description of conflict denotes the following indicators;

- i) A struggle of or rivalry for something which have utility value or usefulness to the contestants; (in economic terms, people would contest for capital because they would use it to generate further value);
- ii) A struggle for value could be for status, resources or power, with the aim of eliminating or neutralizing the rivals;
- iii) It is a societal disease because it is endemic;
- iv) It is a social disease whose cure would be the promotion of collaboration, thus leading to societal health.

Diplomacy on the other hand, have been described as the art of resolving international difficulties peacefully (Wood and Serres, 1971) and they averred further that it is an art, a skill, of professionally applying principles without passion, and of seeking jointly the harmonious solutions of various clashing interests. Put differently, Wood and Serres (1971) described it as the art and skill of harmonious resolutions of clashing interests of people, groups and nation-states.

Holsti (1972), like Nicolson (1939) and Thayer (1959), explained diplomacy further as the application of tact, commonsense and intelligence to contacts with foreign officials, a technique used primarily to reach agreements, compromises and settlements where actors objectives conflict in the international system (Ofogebu, 1980).

Igwe, (2005), described it as the peaceful conduct of relations between mainly states, and the most important instrument of foreign policy. Hans Morgenthau (1948) described it as the preconditions for permanent peace through accommodation (1948: 529).

The common denominators of these conceptions are that diplomacy at whatever level seeks the attainment of,

- (i) Peace and harmony rather than war;
- (ii) Agreement, which generate mutual benefit between the parties in the diplomatic engagement;
- (iii) It confers duties and obligations on the parties;
- (iv) Covenant is often sign confirming both the agreement reached and the obligations conferred on parties;

Compromise positions are that which there is no winner, nor vanquish, its end is the settlement and above all peace and accommodation of every party.

What do we make of these descriptions from the practitioners of diplomacy? The critical points are that diplomacy is a;

- i) Means of achieving harmonious solutions of divergent interests;
- ii) A technique of reaching agreements, compromise and settlements;
- iii) Way of arriving at peace through accommodation (of the interests of others)

The nexus: Conflict and Diplomacy

It is important to note at this point that a synergy exist between conflict in society, organizations and diplomatic practices.

What is this synergy? They are;

When people are pursuing divergent goals with the aim of neutralising the rivals, we contend that they would desist from doing so;

- i) If there would be harmonious resolution of the issue at stake;
- ii) If there would be agreements acceptable to both sides;

iii) If there would be compromise;

iv) If there would be peaceful accommodation of others

Where none of the parties to the conflict would completely lose out of any value, then there would be an amicable resolution of the conflict. This is the synergy, which exists between conflict and diplomacy.

Statement of the Problem

The problem of this study is on the persistence of conflict in both the Nigerian society and the organisations within it. The state and its institutions often address these problems, yet they reoccur sometimes at the shortest intervals and in order times before the panel set up to investigate the problem submits its report, thereby forestalling the attainment of both the society and organisational objectives. In the larger Nigerian society there are the persistence of: (i) Ife-Modakeke case (c. 1835) one of the longest lasting conflicts in Nigeria; (ii) Tiv-Jukun conflict in Wukari local Government of Taraba State; (iii) Zango-Kataf crisis Kaduna State (iv) Tafawa-Balewa conflict in Bauchi State (Otite and Albert, 2007) and the notorious Jos Crisis between the Fulani pastoralists and the people of Riyom in Plateau State.

One common thing about these conflicts is that panels had been set up on all these yet they reoccur all the time. In some cases such as that of Tafawa Balewa case in Bauchi state, while the panel was still sitting and final report was being collated, the crisis happened again and the panel members had to scamp for their lives. What of the most recent Niger-Delta and now the North East situations?

At the organisational level, hardly does a day pass by without the Newspaper reporting treats by organized labour groups to proceed on 'warning strikes', industrial picketing and a full blown strike. Even sterile organizations such as the 'Governors Forum' have warned the National Assembly on the risk of granting full autonomy to the local government system. Perhaps they would be planning a strike action.

These conflicts constitute problems because no real development can take place in an atmosphere of conflict, industrial or societal.

F. J. Roethlisberger cited in Coser (1956) poses the problematic more aptly when he asked 'how can a comfortable working equilibrium be maintained between the various social groups in an industrial enterprise such that no one group in the organization will separate itself out in opposition to the remainder. The principal issue is that the old approach to the management of these conflicts, have become obsolete hence their persistent reoccurrence. What is to be done is what we are here to do, that is, exploring the functionality of diplomatic tools in the resolution of these conflicts.

It is pertinent to note that 'organisation' has become a major mechanism for the attainment of group's objectives. It follows logically therefore that if conflict is allowed to persist within the organisation, whereby the pursuit of divergent goals become the norms, then the group's goals may never be achieved. This is because no group of people can attain group goals in an atmosphere of rancour and disharmony. It had been pointed out earlier that the available techniques for addressing organisational disharmony may not be very effective hence the low level of outputs from both the public and private sectors of the Nigeria economy.

Functions of conflict

Organisational conflicts have resulted into several unpleasant consequences beside loss of productive time and output. This perhaps explains why productivity levels in both the private and the public sectors of Nigeria are generally low, hence the declining Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and the low Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) of workers in Nigeria.

Positive side of conflict

i) Group-Preserving role- conflict has some positive effect such as group-preservation. According to Georg Simmel conflict serves positive functions insofar as it permits the maintenance of relationships under conditions of stress, thus preventing group dissolution through the withdrawal of hostile participants. Conflict is thus seen as performing group-maintaining functions insofar as it regulates system of relationship. Put differently, conflict with 'out-groups' increases internal cohesion of the members of the group.

ii) Conflict - the-unifier, binds antagonists- conflict is seen as a binding element between parties that may previously have stood in no relation to each other. The enemy of my enemy is my friend. It creates association and coalitions.

iii) Conflict is a mechanism through which adjustment to new conditions can be brought about. A flexible society benefits from conflict behaviour inasmuch as this behaviour, generate the creation and modification of norms. A rigid system on the other hand, by not permitting conflict, will impede needed adjustments and so maximise the danger of catastrophic breakdown.

Dysfunctional aspects of conflict

Disharmony in any organisation produces the following consequences;

- i) It hinders progress in both the society and the organisation.
- ii) It leads to unfriendly behaviours of the disputants
- iii) It disintegrate the group
- iv) It leads to a waste of resources both human and material.
- v) No real development takes place either in the state or in the organisation experiencing conflict.

The imperative and sources of conflict

Put differently, organisational conflict refers to a state of **discord** caused by the actual or perceived opposition of needs, values and interests between people working together. Conflict takes many forms in organisations such as;

- i) There is the inevitable clash between formal authority and power and those individuals and groups affected by the management policies.
- ii) There are disputes over how revenues should be shared, how the work should be done and how long and hard people should work (conditions of service).
- iii) There are jurisdictional disagreements among individuals, departments and between unions and management.
- iv) The other sources of conflict in the formal organisation include disputes over wages, condition of work, procedure on discipline and the misinterpretation of collective agreement (Frank, 2007). These are definitely not an exhaustive list of the causal sources of organisational conflict, but suffice to use these for the current analysis.
- iv) Every organisation consists of structures, roles to be performed and human elements-personnel to activate the roles within the structures, towards achieving the purpose of the organisation on a continuing basis. It is further important to note that those who designed the structure were stakeholders who most of the times are not there to guide the organisation's operations according to their original conceptions. This is yet another source of conflict in organisations.

Training and education of the personnel then comes handy in remedying the situation.

- v) Conflict results from a mixture of incompatibility of goals and of reality perceptions. In human collectivities, different people may be trying to use the organisation for different purposes. It has been assumed that individual and groups could

be easily induced to **conform** to predetermined aims set at the top by appropriate money payments and other similar rewards (Spann, 1962:393). This sometimes may not assuage them, thus generating demands which may culminate in conflict within the organisation.

vi) Emerging management policies considered inimical to the welfare of the workers is yet another potential source of conflict. The Management would want to maximise gains by paying very little to the workers and the workers would want to take as much as they can from the employers. This is a conflict situation that needs diplomacy for its resolution.

In politics organisation is the basis of power, Igwe (2005) averred that it is the only instrument with which those who seek or wield power can integrate and harmonize their thoughts, interests and activities hence every level of political activities must have an organizations and therefore conflict cohere. One implication of the Hobbesan social contract was a society with little or no organisation, whereby everyone was a law unto himself, the exercise of unrestrained freedom created enormous adversities for everyone. In order to redress these, people pressed into organisation which rules they must uphold, to secure for each the optimal enjoyment of the remaining freedoms, to compensate for the surrender of the few others.

This endemic nature of conflict in organisations led to the emergence of Organisational theory with the focus on how to mitigate conflict in organizations. Therefore, we can say like Robert Michel, that *he who says organization, say conflict*.

Organisational Conflict

Robert Michel (1875-1936) in his 'Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy' (1962) declared that '*who says organization says oligarchy*' on the basis of the following logical deductions; (i) there will always be necessity in human life to seek common objectives (ii) organisations are indispensable instruments for their achievement, (iii) such organized activity would of necessity produce their own bureaucracies, the organisational mechanism for goals attainment, to systematically coordinate the work of the various individuals or arms of the organisation, (4) one electable attribute of a bureaucracy is hierarchy, a pyramid with so many on the ground and so few at the top (5) it is actually these few at the top that make policies, and control and guide the organization, (6) hence, organisational oligarchy, or the concentration of power in a few hands, an inbuilt organisational inequality, the very opposite of democracy (Igwe, 2005 : 303). This indicated that in every human situation where there is an attempt at organized life, organisations are often created. In these organisations, conflict is inherent. Where these conflicts are not addressed, the goals and objectives of the organisation become compromised, or are attained at a higher cost ratio. It is now clear that whenever a group goal exists, organisation becomes imperative and conflict become endemic.

Formal Organisation

It is instructive to note that we are concerned with formal organisations.

Spann (1962) described formal organisations, as one, which have been deliberately established for the purpose and have structure and procedures to some point consciously prescribed towards the attainment of the established purpose. Igwe (2005) on the other hand, view it as a conscious and purposeful group of people with a leadership and rules governing membership. In the modern world, it is a form of bureaucracy. In any formal organisation, the questions

of power and influence feature considerably. A formal organisation from the above description are; (i) a group of people such as Institute of Public Diplomacy and Management (IPDM) (ii) It has a purpose that is, vision and mission (iii) It has structure set up for the realisation of the goals set; (iv) Above all, it has people occupying the structures and performing roles pursuant to the vision (v) Conflict comes with human element. How have we been managing conflict in Nigeria?

Conflict Management in Nigeria

When organisational conflict snowballs into industrial dispute, there are often statutory legal procedures that have been spelt out in the Trade Union or Labour Act. Beyond that, the management approach to organisational conflict assumes the following forms;

- i) Avoidance Approach- this is the strategy in which the management of the organisation pay no attention, neither does it create a total separation of the combatants in the organisation to allow for limited interactions. This is a very ineffective approach because in the course of production committees, these combatants would come somehow together and the old rivalry would resume with the attendant negative consequences on the organisation output.
- ii) Dominance power intervention: This is where the dispute gets the attention of the management who issues official instructions as to what should be done to normalize the situation without hearing and interviewing the parties to the conflict. It is often ineffective because the actual cause of the conflict might still be inherent in the organisational structure or processes.
- iii) Confrontational: This is a system which examined the sources and types of conflict and achieve resolution that may be at the expense of one or all of the conflicting parties. The effectiveness of this approach led to the enactment of labour practices.

Labour law and Organisational conflict

In an attempt to address organisational conflict, trade dispute, the Nigerian government enacted the labour law, and created the various institutions including the national Industrial court. Pursuant to organisational conflict resolution, it provided for;

- (i) For the parties to the conflict to make attempt to reconcile themselves (if this were feasible, there would have been no conflict in the first place);
 - ii) Where that fails, as it often does, the parties should go to a **Mediator** (agreed to by the parties to the dispute);
 - iii) When the dispute is apprehended by the Minister of labour, following the failure of the two previous steps, the minister would appoint a **conciliator**;
 - iv) The conflict is then send to the **National Industrial court** on the failure of the conciliator to resolve it (Emiola, 1982).
- These provisions have not been able to arrest the valuable man-hours in the production circle lost to strikes, work to rule and picketing in Nigeria.

The principal issues in organisational conflicts revolve around negotiation to achieve compromise (a strategy that seeks resolution of conflict in a way, which satisfies at least part of each party's position) between the personnel and the management, documenting the outcome of the negotiation and wording it in terms that are not subject to misinterpretations. Ensuring that the parties to the agreement observe the duties and responsibilities placed on them by the agreement reached out of the negotiation. These steps were meant to address organisational conflict while others courts were to deal with civil and criminal matters in the larger society.

Societal Approach

Organisations whether formal or informal are subject to **conflict, which is often destructive**. In the macro Nigeria society, where conflict predominates, there is the **official procedures of the use of Panels of Enquiry** where the parties testify, the government set up another panel to review **the first panel's report before a white paper is released**. This often take long period and have so far failed to **settle societal conflicts**. These approach have not been effective. This is because often, the same conflict reoccurs.

At the formal organisational level, **the statutory procedure and instrument of settling Trade Disputes** as espoused above have been making progress **but yet to be there**. This is because very often the Government and Companies where awards have been made **against them refuse to comply with the obligations** thereto and nothing happen to them.

What is to be done to **salvage the situation** therefore is to **apply the tools of diplomacy** in both the formal and societal organisations in order to **achieve justice and peace** in the society. The tools enunciated above are conducive to the management of trade disputes and other associated problems in organisational theory.

Application of Diplomatic Tools

As this paper was being written, workers of Edo State Ministry of Health were locking out everyone out of the hospital and the ministry's premises. The conflict arose from the wages and allowances owed to them by their employer-the government. This is a daily occurrence in both the public and the private sector of the Nigeria economy. What this indicate is the inadequacy of the available conflict management system in Nigeria, *hence the intention of the Institute of Diplomacy and Management (IDM) to explore and canvass for the adoption of entirely different approach, that is, the application of diplomatic tools to conflict resolution and management.*

It would be recalled that diplomacy had played a significant role in the resolution of conflicts in and around the world. If the application of diplomacy had ended international conflicts in the past, then it could well do it now for organisational and national conflicts respectively.

According to Professor Hans Morgenthau (1948), the final task of an intelligent diplomacy, intent upon preserving peace, need appropriate means. It processes include, negotiations and ceasefire.

Diplomacy, the skill of managing negotiations, handling people so that there is little or no ill will. The act of making friends to generate friendly outcomes is just what Nigeria society requires now, for both organisation and national peace to prevail.

The elements of diplomacy to be deployed are;

- (i) Persuasion (the processes of having discussion with another party that culminate in the assurance and certainty of particular duties and obligations).
- (ii) Soothing, (the act of restoring a damaged relationship through a very calm and gentle approach)
- (iii) **Compromise (finding the middle ground)** not a winner takes all but a win-win situation. This is more likely to generate alliance of 'in-group' against 'out-group'
- (iv) **Encoding all duties and obligations arising from all negotiations** in a document to be authenticated by both parties. This must not be subjected to differential interpretations.
- (v) A thorough understanding of what every situation requires (knowledge, appreciation of the culture and personal leadership)
- (vi) **Watching the situation carefully and constantly to avoid and address areas that may generate conflict (fix it before it becomes conflict).**

Conclusion

We have in the preceding sections of this study, examined a series of postulations on conflict in the society and in organisations. We shall limit the concluding remarks to recalling the outcomes of the analysis.

It had been ascertained that we are in organisational chains everywhere in modern society. The organisational chains of the family, schools, church and the work place.

As soon as men have certain objectives to achieve, organisation become inevitable in the attainment of the goal. These bring men together hence, conflict is endemic with organisational man.

Conflicts have both positive and negative functions but the negative overweighs the positive role of conflict. In Nigeria, societal conflicts are often managed by setting up panels of enquiry, sittings held to obtain evidence, report are written and white papers are released conveying the government's position. These approaches have proven to be ineffective in resolving conflicts in the macro Nigeria society.

At the organisational level where mostly trade disputes occur, the labour law specified the procedures for the transformation of the conflict. However, the prevalence of industrial disputes in Nigeria on a daily basis calls to question the efficacy of the provisions of the labour law.

It is instructive to note that the management of conflict require the adoption of a new approach, diplomacy, which has a high content of human relations element. This is because human beings would always maintain peace when persuasions take place, and the outcome would be mutually beneficial. Conflict would recede to the back when there is compromise agreement whereby the conflicting parties do not loose their positions altogether.

The practice of introducing these elements into negotiation and committing the outcomes into a documented form, with its duties and obligations spelt out, is a diplomatic approach. It is herein recommended as a mechanism for generating long lasting solutions to industrial disputes and a panacea to societal conflicts in Nigeria. This is because the current system is no longer adequate as a conflict management instrument in the current Nigeria state. Diplomacy is the answer to conflict management.

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