Situational Leadership Style in Managing Conflicts in an Organization: A Case of Nigerian Eagle Flour Mill.

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Abstract
Conflict is endemic to all social life. It is an inevitable part of living because it is related to division of functions, power relations and role-differentiation. Conflicts cannot be avoided, but it is possible to manage it by using situational leadership approach. The underpinning of the situational leadership approach is that there is no single best style of leadership. This approach asserts that there is no one style of leadership that should be used in a given workplace. This study proposes that if conflicts in an organization are to be managed effectively there is the need to implore the use of situational leadership approach. The way conflicts are managed may determine the following: productivity, efficiency, performance, job contentment, turnover etc. Thus, the overall aim of this study is to examine the contributions of situational leadership approach in the management of conflicts.
This paper relies on primary data through a survey questionnaire that was distributed in Nigerian Eagle Flour Mill to a sample size of 82 respondent's selected using convenience sampling technique. Data collected were analyzed using mean and regression analysis.
Findings from the study shows that situational leadership is relevant as a style of leadership to be adopted by leaders in organizations and that situational leadership contributes significantly to managing organizational conflict.
This paper therefore concludes that the usage of situational leadership approach in the management of conflicts in an organization should be imbibed by leaders as conflict in an organization will be managed in the most appropriate way.

1.0   Introduction

In an organization, when conflicts arise, it needs to be resolved by management for the sake of the organizational growth, survival and enhance performance (Kazimoto, 2013). Conflicts are rarely resolved easily and to a certain extend most conflicts are managed, as individuals work out differences (Barker, Kathy, Watson, & Kibler, 1987) Marquis and Huston (1996) define conflict as the internal discord that results from differences in ideas, values or feelings between two or more people. In organizations, conflict is regarded as the presence of discord that occurs when the goals, interests or values of different individuals or groups are incompatible and frustrate each other's attempting to achieve objective (Kazimoto, 2013). Conflict is inevitable part of organizational life since the goals of different stakeholders such as managers and staff are often incompatible (Jones, Gorge, & Hill, 2000). Organizational conflict may occur between two individuals, within small groups and work teams, or between groups (De Dreu & Van de Vliert, 1997). According to Kazimoto (2013),

> *Conflict is a normal part of any social and organizational change.*
> *The challenge of conflict lies in how one chooses to deal with it.*
> *Conflict will likely fester only to grow into antipathy, create*
> *withdrawal or cause factional infighting within an organization.*
> *Addressed properly, conflict can lead to change, innovation,*

personal and professional growth, and countless other items
that often end-up as missed opportunities. However, all the cited
outcomes from conflict depend on leadership and how conflict
is solved.

This implies that handling conflicts is a great challenge to management in which every leader tries to identify the best method in which the issues at hand can be resolved and how conflict is being addressed determines the end result it has on the organization resulting into a positive or a negative end.

However, the style of leadership imbibed by every manager influences decisions is being made in managing conflict. Leadership style may strongly influence outcomes of a conflict (Kaimenyi, 2009). How leaders in an organization react to problems, resolve crises, reward and punish followers is all relevant to the approach of leadership imbibed. Good leadership approach in organizations lead to reduction in number of disciplinary and grievance cases, improvement of employee's morale, team performance and productivity (Kazimoto, 2013). Graham (2009) posited that as leaders in an organization, it needs to be realized that conflict management is something that needs to have priority and it is not something that can simply be checked off. Thus, managing conflict is easy with committed leadership to avail changes accordingly for employees by introducing teamwork and employees' engagement that will lead to productivity improvement and greater internal efficiency.

According to Spahr (2015), situational leadership is considered to be better than other leadership styles in managing conflict in the sense that situational leadership incorporates many different techniques. It was further explained that Situational leadership is an adaptive style of leading and this strategy encourages leaders to take stock of their team members, weigh the many variables in their workplace, then select the most appropriate method to lead which will help to ensure that organizational aims, goals and objectives are be achieved. Different cause arises conflict at different time in an organization, thus leaders should ensure that they have the insight to understand when to change their management style and what leadership strategy fits each situation at hand.

Statement of Problem
Over the last few decades, people in the field of management have been involved in a search for the "best" style of leadership, yet, the evidence from research clearly indicated that there is no single appropriate leadership style (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988).

Conflicts exist in every organization and there are various causes of conflicts in an organization as a result of people with divergent views coming together to work. Cause of conflict as stated by Nkwotama (2014) includes unmet expectations, unreasonable or unclear policies, interdependent tasks, organizational complexity incompatible personalities, unclear job boundaries, limited resources, time pressure. And some of the result of conflict situations in an organization could be aggressiveness, physical fight, raised voices, statements expressing negative feelings, jealousy, distrust amongst groups/individuals, individuals being prevented from getting their due rewards after performing well, people choosing not to pass useful information to others, individuals refusing to talk to one another or sarcasm. (Fernandez, 2004 cited in Nkwotama, 2014).

Importantly there is a need to handle this conflict in the most suitable manner so as avoid negative end result. The researcher is well aware that there are various techniques in resolving conflict in an organization, but there is a need for leaders in such organizations to be taken into consideration. Leaders are the most considered source of conflict in many organizations (Kazimoto, 2013) and these leaders are the ones in best position of managing conflict as well as selecting the best techniques in managing conflict.

However, style of leadership of such leaders has an influence on decisions being made in the organization including how conflicts are to be managed in the organization. The situational approach of leadership is therefore attached to the style being adopted by the leaders to see how situational leadership approach contributes to managing of conflict in an organization.

Research Objectives

1. Evaluate the relevance of situational leadership style in an organization.
2. Examine the contribution of situational leadership in managing conflict in an organization.

Research Hypotheses

$H_0{}^1$: Situational leadership style does not have any relevance in an organization.
$H_0{}^2$: There is no significance contribution of situational leadership style in managing organizational conflict.

2.0 Literature Review

Leadership Styles

Generally, leadership is about inspiring and influencing behaviour of followers as Pierce and Newstrom (2000) cited in Kaimenyi (2009) believes that leaders influence others through their ability to motivate, inform, inspire, exhibit technical competence, communicate effectively, and convey a vision. Yalokwu (2002) defined leadership as the art of influencing others to direct their will, abilities and efforts to the achievement of leader's goal. However, exhibiting leadership means not only influencing others but also doing so in a manner that enables the organizations to attain its goals (Vroom & Jago, 2007).

There exist different leadership styles and strategies used by leaders in an organization to ensure that goals and objective of the organization are being accomplished. Among the leadership styles commonly employed that was stated by Khan, Khan, Qureshi, Ismail, Rauf, Latif, and Tahir (2015) are Autocratic leadership style, Democratic leadership styles, Laissez Faire leadership style, Bureaucratic Leadership style and Situational leadership style. This leadership style was further explained in the table below.

Table 1: Definitions of Leadership Styles

S/N	Leadership Styles	Definitions
	Autocratic	The dictator lays down the law in his or her group and expects individuals to perform without questioning his or her authority
	Democratic	It capitalizes on their skills and talents by letting them share their views, rather than simply expecting them to conform
	Laissez-Faire	Very little guidance from leaders Complete freedom for followers to make decisions Leaders provide the tools and resources needed Group members are expected to solve problems on their own
	Bureaucratic	Everything is decided in the light of predetermined. Everything is

| | | done as per policy or procedure. |
| | Situational | In it everything is decided on the spot. No pre-plan is required rather everything is decided as per requirement. The leader changes his/her pace with the changing situation |

Source: Adapted from Khan, Khan, Qureshi, Ismail, Rauf, Latif, &Tahir (2015)

Situational Leadership Style

Successful leaders are those who can adapt their behaviour to meet the demands of their unique situation (Hersey & Blanchard, 1996). Situational leadership theory proposes that effective leadership requires a rational understanding of the situation and an appropriate response, rather than a charismatic leader with a large group of dedicated followers (Graeff, 1997; Grint, 2011). Hersey and Blanchard's situational leadership theory (SLT) is one of the best-known theories in the field of managerial leadership, and in their model, a leader applies different leadership styles according to a follower's (an employee/subordinate's) maturity level (Meier, 2016). Situational leadership theory advocates matching the leader to the situation if possible or matching the leadership orientation (task versus relation) to the follower maturity (Hersey & Blanchard, 1996). Hersey and Blanchard (1996) further expressed that the Situational Leadership Model suggests that there is no "one size fits all" approach to leadership and that depending on the situation, varying levels of "leadership" and "management" are necessary. However, they pin pointed that it is very important for leaders to first identify their most important tasks or priorities and secondly, leaders must consider the readiness level of their followers by analyzing the group's ability and willingness. Thus in relation to the level of these variables, leaders must make use of the most appropriate style of leadership that best fit in a given situation.

This style of leadership emphasized the level of maturity, or readiness of the followers as a contingency or context that leaders need to account for in order to establish the correct fit between the leader and follower (Bass, 2008). The difference between situational leadership and other styles of leadership is that situational leadership incorporates many different techniques. The style of choice is based on the organization's environment and the competence and commitment of its followers.

Some characteristics of the situational style of leadership as stated by Spahr (2015) include:

i. **Insight**: The situational leader must be able to understand the needs of the followers, and then adjust his or her management style to meet those needs.

ii. **Flexibility**: Situational leaders must be able to move seamlessly from one type of leadership style to another.

iii. **Trust**: The leader must be able gain his or her followers' trust and confidence.

iv. **Problem solving**: The situational leader must be able to solve problems, such as how to get a job done using the best leadership style available.

v. **Coach**: The situational leader must be able to evaluate the maturity and competence of the followers and then apply the right strategy to enhance the follower and their personal character

Furthermore, Constanzo (2005) opined that the strength of situational leadership includes being directive and flexible in nature, recognizing and valuing differences among team members, plays to the individual's strengths and nurtures and works to develop their weak areas and also has endured a moderate test of time. Also this style of leadership takes into consideration the people within the organization, making this a considerate style of leadership to be imbibed as Yalokwu (2002) posited that leadership focuses on people aspect of

management and it's based on the assumption that organizational effectiveness significantly depends on their motivation, effort and abilities.

Situational Leadership and Conflict Management
As leaders in an organization, there is a need to understand that managing conflict is a task that needs to have priority and not to be handled with levity. In managing conflict, the role of leadership is an important element, which makes the style being imbibed by the leader influences and directs employees in an organization, which determines many qualities and skills needed in order to effectively handle conflicts. Hendel, Fish and Galon (2005) opined that leadership style and choice of conflict management strategies may strongly influence outcomes of a conflict. Conflict arises due to different factors in an organization, and until the cause of a conflict is identified, the best method to manage such conflict cannot be derived.
The characteristics of situational style of leadership stated by Spahr (2015)) simplify signifies that in an organization, for conflict to be managed using the situational style of leadership, leaders need to have great knowledge on their followers needs and competence and ensure that there should be a flexible style of leadership to meet those needs when expected and in the right way as well as having the ability to evaluate their followers' maturity and competence.

3.0   Methodology
This research was conducted in the Nigerian Eagle Flour Mill, Ibadan. The organization has an estimated total population 103 employees involved in leadership activities and the Yaro Yamane (1967) formula was used to determine the sample size of 82. The sampling technique that the researcher used in this research was convenience sampling which means each individual of the population has an equal and independent chance for being chosen to be part of the sample. Survey resign designed was adopted in the study, as this type of design is most preferred because it is concerned with the statistics that result when data are abstracted from a number of individual/groups cases (John & Kahn, 2008). To achieve the research objective, primary source of data collection was imbibed and a 5point Likert scale questionnaire was designed as the instrument to elicit needed information from respondents. 82 copies of questionnaire were distributed to employees in the organization under consideration and 71 copies of questionnaire were retrieved recording a return rate was 87%. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyze the data where mean value accepted at 3.0 was used to determine the relevance of situational leadership in an organization and regression analysis to examine the contribution of situational leadership style on conflict management at 0.05 level of significance.

4.0   Results
Table 2: Mean values showing relevance of situational leadership

Relevance of Situational Leadership	Mean
Situational leadership requires a rational understanding of the present situation	3.7215
There is a need for leaders to understand their follower's needs before deciding on the style of leadership to be adopted.	3.6329
Leadership requires flexibility	3.9241
Maturity and competence level of followers are being evaluated before deciding on how to lead.	3.6962
Situational leadership gives room for adaptability of change	3.7089

Source: Field Survey, 2017

The data in table 2 above shows the relevance of situational style of leadership in an organization. Flexibility in leadership has the highest mean value of 3.9241, followed by rational understanding of the present situation with 3.7215, room for adaptability of change with 3.7089, evaluating maturity and competence level of followers with 3.6962, and understands their follower's needs with 3.6329. The mean value of the various statements implies that situational leadership is relevant as a style of leadership to be adopted by a leader in an organization as majority of the statement have a mean value above the accepted value of 3.0. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative accepted.

Table 3: Regression summary showing the contribution of situational leadership in managing organizational conflict

R= .842[a]						
R Square =.709						
Adjusted R Square=.706						
Model		Sum of Square	df	Mean Square	F	Sig
	Regression	206.987	1	206.987	219.467	.000(a)
	Residual	84.882	70	.943		
	Total	291.870	71			

a. Dependent Variable: Conflict Management
b. Predictors: (Constant), Situational Leadership
Source: Field Survey, 2017

Table 3 revealed the contribution of situational leadership in managing organizational conflict, and the result depicts that situational leadership contributes significantly to managing organizational conflict. The table further reveals R=.842[a], R Square=.709, Adjusted R Square= .706. This suggests that the predictor accounts for 70.6% (.706) contribution to how conflicts are being managed in an organization. The remaining variance is as a result of variables outside the scope of the study. The ANOVA table also reveals that the independent variable (Situational leadership) have significant effect on the criterion variable: $F(1, 70) =219.467$, $P< 0.01$. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative accepted.

5.0   Conclusion and Recommendation

Change is constant in every area of an organization, thus there tends to be variation in situation of activities in an organization. Leaders therefore require the ability to be flexible in their style of leadership as well as having the ability to adapt to changes that might occur in an organization. This study therefore ascertained that situational leadership has a great relevance in an organization and concludes that leaders should imbibe the use of situational leadership styles in leading their followers in an organization as this will help in ensuring effective leadership. Also in managing conflict in an organization, the study concludes that situational leadership styles contribute tremendously toward ensuring that conflict in an organization are being managed. This style of leadership will guide leaders in understand the exact cause of conflict in the organization and look into the best approach to be employed based on the present situation, that will help to solve the problem at hand in the organization. This study therefore recommends that in selecting style of leadership in on organization, situational leadership is an appropriate style of leadership to be imbibed.

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