CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN THE WORKPLACE: THE SUPERIOR SECRETARY PERSPECTIVES.

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Abstract
Conflicts among people who work together are inevitable. Most conflicts however, are not only unpleasant, but also unproductive. While occasional conflicts can lead to an exploration of and solution to problem, it is more often an expression of petty differences for which no real solution exists. An effective team thrives on cooperation, and conflict makes cooperation difficult if not impossible. Supervisor – secretary conflict can be either work-related or interpersonal. Both kinds require attention. This paper posits that a supervisor and secretary need to develop team spirit if they are to be fully effective. This paper discusses the concept of conflict, conflict management, causes of conflict and characteristics of mutual support and good communication. It recommends among others that supervisor and secretary should give mutual support to one another in executing their roles in the work place for the overall benefit of the organisation.

Introduction
Conflict is seen as a situation where there is one form of abnormality or the other. According to Ukadike (2006), every society is bound to experience one form of conflict or the other. Otite (1999) asserts that crisis arise as a result of divergent interests, goals and aspiration of individuals or groups within the workplace. It is a struggle over values and claims to status, power and scarce resources in which the aims of the opponent are to injure or criminate their rivals.

Akpotor and Eregha (2006) also view conflict as a normal process of interaction, particularly in complex societies in which resources are usually scarce. Deutsch (1973), observed that although conflicts may generally exist whenever incompatible activities occur and may result in a 'win-lose' characters, while the resolution, transformation and management of conflicts may produce a 'win-win' situation. In the opinion of Ukadike (2006), what makes a society a progressive one is the extent to
which conflicting interests and needs are constructively managed so that violence does not threaten its continued existence. Etta (2006), states that conflicts are not to be demonized but confronted with efficient procedures for cooperative problem solving. It is against this background that this paper discusses conflict management in the workplace: The superior secretary perspective.

**Concept of Conflict**
Conflict has been perceived by different scholars to mean different things based on their perspectives. For instance, Otite (1999) says conflict arise from the pursuit of divergent interests, goals and aspirations by individuals and or groups in defined social and physical environments. Coser and Ukadike (2006) says that conflict may be conceptualized as a way of solving problem originating from opposing interests and from the continuing of society. Wilson and Kalb (1949) while attempting to define conflict, asserts that it is the conscious act involving personal or group contact and communication. To them, conflict is a normal process of interaction particularly in complex societies in which resources are usually scarce. Conflicts are also challenging situations and circumstances which characterize life's experiences.

**Causes of Conflict**
Conflict may arise as a result of different causes. Knowing the cause of the conflict is a vital step in managing the conflict. A conflict cannot be managed effectively if its cause or source is not known. Nelson and Quick (1997) divide the causes of conflict into two broad categories' Structural factors, which stem from the nature of the organisation and the way in which work is organised and Personal factors which arise from differences among individuals.


Conflict is destructive when it takes attention from other important activities, undermine morals of self-concept, polarizes people and groups, reduces cooperation, increases or sharpens difference, leads to irresponsible and harmful behaviour such as fighting, name calling and so on. On the other hand, conflict is constructive when it results in clarification of important problems and issues, involves people in resolving issues important to them, causes authentic communication, helps release emotion, anxiety and stress, builds cooperation among people through learning more about each other, and help individuals develop understanding skills. Tjosvold (1993), believes that the assumption that conflict is based on opposing interests leads to viewing conflict as a struggle to see whose strength and interest will dominate and whose will be subordinated. We must fight to win, or at least not lose. The assumption that you have largely cooperative goals leads to viewing the conflict as a common problem to be solved for mutual benefit, which in turn makes it more likely that the conflict will be constructive and that people will improve their abilities to deal with conflict.
Types of Conflict and their characteristics

It can be easily observed from the above figure which attempts to differentiate between competitive and cooperative conflict, that in case of competitive conflict, the parties pursue directly opposite goals. Each mistrusts the other's intentions and disbelieves what the other party says. Both parties actively avoid constructive dialogue and have a 'win-lose' attitude. Unavoidably, the disagreement persists and they go their separate ways. On the other hand, a 'win-win' attitude according to Coser (1991), is a frame of mind and heart that constantly seeks mutual benefit in all human interactions. 'Win-win' means that agreements or solutions are mutually beneficial and mutually satisfying. With a win-win solution, parties feel good about the decision and feel committed to the action plan. Win-win sees life as a cooperative not competitive arena. Most people tend to think in terms of dichotomies: strong or weak, hardball or softball, win or lose. But that kind of thinking is fundamentally flawed. It is based on power and position rather than principle. Win-win is based on the paradigm that there is plenty for everybody, that one person's success is not achieved at the expense or exclusion of the success of others. Win-win is a belief in the third alternative. “It's not your way or my way: it's a better way, a higher way”.

Human conflict according to Etta (2006) originated as a result of a deficiency in human understanding, consciousness and awareness to human relation. Thus the science of conflict resolution is the social science which provides knowledge through which humanity can live together in cordiality, flexibilities, interaction, complementation and solidarities and for humanity to resolve her conflict.

Concept of Conflict Management
Conflict management according to Ukadike (2006) is perceived to be a wider concept which involves conflict resolution and transformation into an institution which provides yard-stick or regulatory procedures for dealing with conflict, both for the present and future occurrence. According to Ikeanyibe and Njoku (2006) conflict management is a process of preventing conflict from occurring and of resolving it when it has occurred. The first stage of conflict management is that of conflict prevention, peace promotion and consolidation. Umobighe in Ikeanyibe and Njoku (2006) state that conflict management represents a process in which the starting point is conflict prevention and or peace promotion and consolidation through the elimination of the causes of friction and the creation of a propitious atmosphere for harmonious relationships. This presupposes the existence of a base point of relative peace and harmony in human relationships. It a point at which friction is kept at tolerable levels and conflict management is concerned with peace promotion and consolidation, as well as conflict prevention.

In the light of the above, this paper stressed the need for the supervisor and secretary to
develop team spirit to prevent conflict and to be effective in carrying out their duties in a conducive atmosphere.

**Conflict Management in the Workplace**

Conflicts among people who work together are inevitable. Many conflicts on the job are caused by differing perceptions of the work situation. As stated by Akpomudjere (2013), the areas of concern for a manager and secretary are job skills, organisational abilities, reliability, punctuality, and level of responsibilities. Akpomi and Chiorlu (2005) point out that interpersonal conflicts may also arise because of role clashes, gamesmanship and negative attitude. Divisions of responsibilities among co-workers may not be so well established as those between supervisor and secretary. Such factors as rank, area of responsibility, experience, knowledge, time on the job, individual personalities, willingness to assume responsibility and age, all contribute to the way people work together to achieve office goals. You can establish team spirit with people who are – or consider themselves – your supervisor, equals or subordinates.

Some workers do not develop team spirit because they are more concerned with the role they are playing than they are with achieving organisational goals. Akpomudjere notes that your career will eventually depend more on your ability to meet organisational objectives than it will on your relationship with a particular supervisor and that a supervisor and secretary need to develop team spirit if they are to be fully effective.

Aroma (2010) states that communication is the only prevention and the cure for conflict in the workplace. Without good communication, working together is difficult and team building is impossible. Team spirit in the opinion of Aroma is only possible when each member of the team is able to communicate openly and honestly. Mutual support and good communication are foundation for team spirit, which is then built upon the characteristics of dependability, helpfulness, and caring amongst others as listed below.

**Dependability** – Supervisor and secretary must not only be able to depend on each other for such basics as being at work on time and having competent job skills, but also need to depend on each other for constructive criticism and mutual support. Constructive criticism is necessary for growth. Criticism is constructive when it focuses on a problem another person has the power to correct. If you criticize someone's height, for example, your criticism would not be constructive – a person can't alter his or her height. If a person is making many typographical errors, however, you can help that person become more a productive worker by using constructive criticism to point out the errors and suggest, for example that the person perhaps try typing a bit more slowly or spend a bit more time proof reading his or her work.

Be specific about the problem: Rather than accuse somebody of writing rotten letter, for example, tell the person how to improve one specific letter. Limit criticism to one thing at a time; do not save all your critical remarks for one barrage. Comment on behaviour that needs improvement when the behaviour occurs. Focus on the goal
rather than on the obstacle. Be positive in stating what goal you would like to see
achieved. Let the other person know that you appreciate his or her efforts to improve.
Encourage every step in the right direction. Give the other person a reputation to live
up to. Assume that the other person can and will improve. In the case of improving
letter writing, for example, you will encourage the other person to write better letters
by letting him or her know that you have faith in his or her abilities to do a good job.

**Objectivity:** Conflict is often the result of failure to see situations objectively.
Managers and secretaries should be able to depend on each other for accurate, reliable,
and objective information. This means that if you make a mistake, admit it and attempt
to discover what went wrong. Neither should you as a secretary nor your supervisor
allow the other to act on the basis of incorrect information. Objectivity requires the
honesty to see the truth and the courage to communicate it.

**Good Timing:** Supervisor and secretary have to learn each other's moods and work
habits so that they can coordinate office activities. A secretary ought to know, for
example, when a supervisor's most productive hours are. A secretary should also
schedule appointments and conferences at times they are most likely to be productive.

**Helpfulness** – Team spirit requires that each person be willing to help the other. In
athletics, one of the characteristics of a winning team is that each team member
assumes the responsibility of helping a teammate who is having trouble. The same is
true in the office. Supervisor and secretary need to help each other by going the extra
mile and by being committed to the other.

**Commitment:** Team spirit requires a sense of commitment. Supervisor and secretary
need to feel committed to each other's personal and career growth. Each should do
everything possible to help the other develop the skills necessary to achieve personal
and career goals. A secretary should assume the responsibility of making his or her
supervisor look good to the supervisor's superiors. In addition to ensuring that written
messages are prepared carefully, a secretary should be alert for other ways to be
helpful. Have you double checked the figures in a financial report? Have you told your
supervisor about a conflict between two staff members? Do what you can to protect
your supervisor from unpleasant surprise.

Supervisors can show commitment to secretaries by making sure that they are paid as
much as they are worth. A supervisor should be willing to request appropriate raises
for her or his secretary even when corporate funds are tight. A supervisor should also
do everything possible to make sure that his or her secretary can earn career
advancement without having to change jobs. Supervisors can also show commitment
by helping their secretaries obtain the equipment and assistance necessary to do the
job right.

**Caring** – It's much easier for a supervisor and secretary to develop team spirit when
they care about each other as people. A manager and secretary who dislike each other
will find it difficult to be helpful and dependable. People who care about each other, on
the other hand find it difficult not to be helpful and dependable. Caring usually begins
as mutual respect. A manager and secretary must respect each other's abilities and be
willing to contribute to a successful team. The signs of caring in a supervisor-secretary
relationship are the same as they would be in any other relationship, except that the purpose of caring is to achieve organizational objectives.

**Conclusion:**
Conflicts among people who work together are inevitable. Such factors as rank, time on the job, individual responsibility, experience, willingness to assume responsibility, band age, all contribute to the way people work together to achieve the office goals. A supervisor and secretary need to develop team spirit to prevent conflict if they are to be fully effective in executing their roles for the overall benefit of the company.

**Recommendations:**
1. When a supervisor and secretary work together, they should strive not only to get along with each other, but also to be the best they can be in working for the company.
2. Working as a team is more effective hence every secretary should attempt to build team spirit in the office.
3. Supervisor and secretary should communicate openly and honestly.
4. Supervisor and secretary should give mutual support to one another in executing their roles in the work place, for the overall benefit of the organization.

**Reference**


