

Full Length Research Paper

Communication Strategies and Appropriate Media for the Management of Security Challenges and Conflicts in Nigeria

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Abstract

Insurgency, terrorism and other criminal activities are plaguing the Nigerian socio-political environment. Among other things, these are crime against humanity, but some seem to wear the cloaks of religion, politics, ethnic discrimination, territorial encroachment etc, with no absolute conflict philosophy or objective. This work examines the nature, sources, causes and kinds of conflict, especially the ones affecting the Nigerian economy. Conflict has also been identified to be endogenous (emotional and within the system) and exogenous (external and between systems). Appropriate strategies and media for showcasing, reporting and containing conflict situations in Nigeria have been recommended for proper management, reduction and if possible resolution. These media are both traditional and modern. However, the work recommends that there should be no negotiation with inhuman, mindless and faceless organizations, no matter the level and manner of insurgency, terrorism and other conflict situations.

Keywords: Conflict, communication, organizations.

Introduction

Security challenges like the Nigerian north East insurgency, cattle rustling, Niger Delta militancy, kidnapping, armed robbery, herders, farmers, conflict, pipeline vandalism etc., are major conflicts in Nigeria. Conflict is perceived and regarded from different perspectives by different individuals and organizations. Different meanings have been attached to the concept, most of which carry negative connotations which are also driven by competing needs or desires and even violence between people or groups in the society. In one conflict

is perceived by Wilson (1997) as "instances in which units or individuals within an organization work against, rather than with one another. Another definition which is said to be widely accepted has it that conflict is seen as "a process in which one party perceives that another party has taken some action which will exert negative effects on its major interests, or is about to take such action". Baron (1990 p 458) lists the key elements in conflict to include:

- 1). Opposing interest between, individuals or groups.
- 2). Recognition of such opposition.
- 3). The belief by such side that the other will thwart (or has already thwarted) these interests.
- 4). An action that actually produces such thwarting.

It is believed that opposing interests are the core generators of conflict. This is because as one party tries to protect its own interest it crosses the path of the other or steps on the other's toe.

On his part, Straus (1974 p. 142) states that "conflict includes race riots, donnybrooks in hockey games, jockeying for the right of way with a taxi driver, strikes and lockouts, elections, competition in the market place, family quarrels, separation and divorce, revolution and civic disorder, war and a variety of other human and social relationships where the interest of parties are, or appear to be opposed". Conflict is a kind of war between individuals or nations. It could be in sports. It could be verbal abuse which is a common source of conflict among people. Conflict is also likely to occur when two parties want or need the same thing. In this case, the only way to secure the desired thing or object is to beat or overcome the other party or group. It can be endogenous and exogenous. According to Wilson in Nkana (2004, p 91), Conflict is any situation which may result in controversy struggle, strife, or contention and in consequence, bring about an uncertainty within the self (an endogenous conflict) or bring about a state of incompatibility between humans and a crisis within society (exogenous conflict). Endogenous conflict is inner- emotional and psychological. It is internal-within-system conflict. Exogenous conflict is external between system conflicts.

Mostly conflict is conceived from the mind before it becomes obvious. This means it starts from the endogenous and becomes exogenous. In any case resolution can be achieved by settling or clearing a difficulty. Communication therefore, is a source as well as the tool for managing, reducing and resolving conflict. Conflict is regenerative and could be minimized through adequate communication. If the broadcast media of radio and television are used, it becomes an added advantage since these media of communication can reach a large and heterogeneous audience at the same time. This work examines the communication strategies and the media that are appropriate for the management of conflict and security challenges in Nigeria.

Various strategies can be used to tackle security challenges in Nigeria. Traditional communication media and other channels are perhaps significant and important. Traditional societies attach significance to traditional communication modes. Their media and channels have force and credibility, because of the significance attributed to these modes of communication. It is believed that they can effectively tackle the problems of our national ridicule as well as other societal problems.

The Nature of Conflict

Conflict and crises are security challenges found everywhere, especially where individuals come together in groups or organizations. It certainly cannot be ruled out, but can be

minimized, managed, reduced or at best, resolved. This therefore presupposes that it is illusory to try to eliminate conflict from the society. People, especially workers, have generally been to different schools, live in different places, have different orientations and acquire different skills and behavior. This also leads to differentiation in their perceptual ability because of individual differences in their psychological endowment. These differences are brought to bear in group situations which in turn generate pressure towards conflict. The conflict could be internal and external. That is, it could be internal-within-system, called endogenous, inner emotional and psychological, as well as external-between-system called exogenous.

Nevertheless, the conflict could be a necessity for growth. It could be heightened by certain intended and unintended behavior. It could be used to understand human beings better. This is because people come "out of their shells" when in conflict. As a result, they could be predicted. It is widely believed that conflict could be managed and reduced while its complete resolution depends on the amelioration of certain conditions.

Kinds of conflict

The following kinds of conflict could be identified:

- 1). Social conflict: hatred, marital conflict, religious conflict, ethnic, racial etc.
- 2). Political conflict: boundary dispute, quest for power, election rivalry etc.
- 3). Economic conflict: balance of payment, SAP, debt burden etc.
- 4). Administrative or managerial conflict.
- 5). Mental or psychological conflict
- 6). Semiotic conflict: semantic, pragmatic, and syntactic.

All security challenges, including insurgency, terrorism and the earlier mentioned ones fall within these categories, especially two categories – social and political, but the objectives of some of these groups are not clear. The fifth category -- mental, is psychological, inner emotional, internal-within-system, and endogenous. It could be called intra-personal conflict.

Sources of conflict

Researchers have revealed that there are two schools of thought concerning the sources and causes of group conflict. These are the Human Relations approach and the Pluralist approach. Both have differing views pertaining to group conflict. While those supporting the Human Relations approach, believe that conflict is NOT inevitable, the Pluralists believe that conflict is inevitable, good and should be encouraged and regulated.

Sources according to the Human Relations theorists

Those in this school of thought have advanced the following

following as sources of group conflict:

- 1). Misunderstandings
- 2). Incentive and non-supportive relationships
- 3). Failure to communicate openly and honestly
- 4). A climate of distrust, unreasonable pressure, or competition.

Studies carried out by human relations theorists show that “conflicts which create winners and losers (so-called “win-lose” conflicts) display predictable patterns of interaction and have predictable effects on perceptual, intellectual, and emotional processes” (Straus 1974 p. 145). This is because as each side becomes committed to winning, its members endeavor to make their solution accepted without adequate search for constructive or integrative solutions. It is also viewed that since the win-lose conflict creates winners and losers, a residue of hostility remains. This could account for why some conflicts are prolonged. No party wants to lose face.

Furthermore, there could be a decrease in accurate and candid communication between parties as suspicion of the other party continues, and “conflict traps” emerge, such that further interaction between the groups will be regarded as hostile by both parties.

Sources according to the Pluralists

The pluralists believe that conflict is inevitable as well as a natural and desirable part of life. They see conflict as the balance wheel of society and as a vehicle for social change and justice. Conflict, according to them, is not destructive, but a facilitator of interests of all groups. If this is so, one may be justified to ask about their position and stand on, or judgment of insurgency and terrorism which are criminally destructive. Further to the above, the pluralists suggest that subsystems within organizations should be encouraged to compete with one another, so that the interests of the parties will be best served. This indicates the acceptance of conflict as an inevitable aspect of organizational growth, which seeks to distribute power within the organization in a manner that will create balance between both parties. This presupposes that each party in an organization should be able to exercise a little control over the leadership.

Causes of conflict

The conflict involves the presence or perception of opposing interests. But then it is not a sufficient avenue for the occurrence of actual conflict. Sometimes incompatible interests fail to develop open confrontation. Moreover, some researchers believe that conflict does not often emerge in situations where opposing interests

are not present, or where, at least, ambiguity exists. However, many factors contribute to the generation of conflict. These could be viewed from two perspectives. They are Organizational perspective and Interpersonal perspective.

The Organizational perspective of conflict

Causes of conflict from the organizational perspective could be categorized into the following:

1). Competition over scarce resources

This is the most obvious organization-based cause of conflict. Every organization is plagued with limited resources and conflicts often arise over the distribution of space, money, equipment, or personnel. Each party tends to inflate its contribution to the organization so as to be rewarded accordingly. This could result in intense, prolonged conflict.

2). Ambiguity over responsibility or jurisdiction

Responsibility has to do with the uncertainty between groups or individuals on who is responsible for carrying out certain functions, tasks or duties. As a result, each party disclaims responsibility thereby resulting in conflict. Jurisdiction has to do with who has authority or jurisdiction to do or control certain things. Dispute over; this can result in intense conflict.

3). Interdependence and its results

Some individuals or groups depend on others for the effective performance of their duties. They receive inputs and other contribution from them continually and cannot continue without it. But when these contributions are delayed or not enough or not forthcoming, conflict could result. This is because they perceive that their goals have been jeopardized or interfered with by others.

4). Reward System

This system has to do with all areas of salary, fringe benefits, bonuses and allowances. This system could instigate one group against the other and this could generate conflict. This could result if persons involved perceive the system as unfair or biased. Subsequently the group that fails to benefit may experience resentment which could lead to unnecessary conflict.

5). Differentiation

Conflict is a bi-product of differentiation. People working in

in different sections of an organization tend to regard one another with suspicion. They also see others as less worthy, less competent and different. They overvalue themselves and their units. This differentiation generates conflict in an organization. The different groups work on alienation of each other and tend to lose sight of organizational goals while working for self interest.

6). Competition over Scarce Resources

Organizations are plagued by limited resources which have to be shared among the different units and sections. This includes space, money, personnel, equipment, etc. Conflict could arise over the distribution of these as each group wants to inflate its share after trying also to inflate its contribution. This is intensified by their self-serving bias.

7). The Interpersonal perspective of conflict

Causes of conflict from the above perspective could be seen in the following:

8). Grudges

When people are angered by others and they tend to be ridiculed, they exhibit negative tendencies towards those who put them under that condition. They could seek revenge, which could also destroy the peaceful co-existence among them to the detriment of the organization.

9). Wrong perception or faulty attribution

People tend to attribute wrong reasons to others' actions. They may feel that those actions were geared towards destroying them or thwarting their efforts. They keep wondering and at long last give faulty reasons to such actions. This could also lead them to react. This is a serious cause of conflict.

Faulty communication

This has to do with pressing the wrong communication buttons that trigger misunderstanding. This could be unintentional. But then, it causes anger and "flexing of muscles". Faulty communication can lead to negative feedback which could cause negative criticism. This is a case of message generated and sent not being in tandem with message perceived, received and acted upon, or message not properly sent. This certainly results in conflict. For example, if a boss sends an unclear message to a subordinate, there is bound to be misunderstanding as the subordinate may carry out an instruction he thought he received. This turns out to be distorting and a conflict generator between both parties.

With the identification of sources and causes of conflict, management, and / or resolution can be effected.

Conflict Management

Conflict management refers to attempt to control or regulate conflict through a number of measures. According to Best (2006 p.26) the aim of conflict management is to reduce or mitigate the negative and destructive capacities of conflict. The process involves conflict limitation, containment and litigation. Burton (1990 p. 26) refers to this as conflict prevention. Conflict management is perhaps an admission of the reality of the inevitability of conflict in the society. It also means that not all conflict can be resolved. Therefore what practitioners do is to manage and regulate it.

Other concepts associated with the "appeasement" of conflict are conflict resolution and conflict transformation. This work does not treat both concepts. However, conflict resolution refers to a situation in which different approaches are employed to address and resolve conflict once and for all. This brings about total peace. It is a situation in which conflict is satisfactorily dealt with through a resolution (Mitchel and Banks 1996 p.113). Conflict transformation is a situation that arises after conflict resolution. Here a longer standing relationship is built through a process of change in perception and attitude.

Communication strategies for the management of Insurgency, Terrorism and other crimes and conflicts

Communication has been seen as an avenue through which several issues in the economy can be addressed. Though some people tend to arrogate much powers to communication, it is quite erroneous to think that communication has enormous powers to cause a lot of things to happen. However, communication strategies could be employed to tackle problematic situations that could jeopardize the collective interest and integrity of a people as witnessed in crimes like insurgency, terrorism, vandalism, militancy, ethnic rivalry and other conflict situations. Appropriate media that could be used to manage and tackle these conflicting challenges are both traditional and modern.

Traditional Communication media Perspective

It is known that from time immemorial our tradition abhors violence. Injunctions were normally placed on issues to deter criminals and other recalcitrant elements from acting at variance with constituted authorities. When traditional injunctions are placed and the implications spelt

out, the fear of a repercussion could discourage them. The notion that the more one kills the more he is nearer to heaven should be debunked through adequate enlightenment and a truthful interpretation of the scriptures at the local level. Palm fronds, other floral and symbolographic media could be used as injunction and for deterrence. Their presentation to warring parties could communicate warning, peace, invitation to discussion, negotiation etc. Other traditional communication modes appropriate for this assignment could be summarized as Instrumental, Demonstrative, Institutional, Iconographic, Visual and Extra-mundane. They are social, spiritual, cultural and otherwise in application, as well as powerful and result-oriented in outcome. It is pertinent to point out that these traditional communication media are rural and community based. Their use and application are selective and discriminatory, so caution should be adopted and demonstrated.

Modern Communication media Perspective

There are several communication media classified under mass and non-mass. The mass media are radio, television, newspaper and magazine. Books and film are less mass. The Global System of Mobile telecommunication (GSM) and other communication gadgets are non-mass, at least for now. The social media could also be avenues through which conflict and other security challenges could be curtailed. This can be done by sending messages to the net, so that people that access the net can receive the information.

Television

Television is an audio-video medium with a lot of potentials, though some of its essence has been eroded by the advent of the social media. However, for now the use of television to manage crisis is inevitable. Jingles, drama pieces, advertorials, social documentaries etc, could help to minimize the tendency for these to reoccur. News extracts on actual occurrences and a depiction of security agents' readiness to contain the menace could help. Television should come up with interviews and discussions of the state of the nation and the way forward. The public should be made aware of the situation in order to use word-of-mouth to spread the gospel of peace. Television should show dramatic extracts in which criminals attack areas occupied by their family members and friends by mistake, and realize their folly later.

Radio

Radio, it is said, could penetrate into the hinterlands than television. Radio, as its television counterpart, has done a lot of jingles on peace and reconciliation. This notwithstanding,

radio news and commentaries could enlighten and inform citizens on crimes and other forms of conflict trigger the need for condemnation and a change of mind towards a better Nigeria. Radio discussions and interviews are also pertinent. Activities of security agents should be handled with diplomacy so that it does not amount to a dysfunction.

Newspaper

Newspaper editorials, features and advertorials are pertinent strategies for the management of conflict. News of criminal activities and strategies should be made obvious for members of the public to be aware and mount counter strategies for their safety. Information on safety alternatives for the public should be published by the papers.

Magazine

Most write-ups on issues published in magazines are features. The polished and liberal nature of magazine stories could work emotions and trigger sympathy. Painting a picture of the situation and the implication on individuals and society could discourage the menace. Members of criminal gangs and sects are human beings with flesh, blood, bone and veins, though inhuman in behaviour. They were made by God, and therefore, an emotional release could work and prick on their conscience.

Global System of Mobile telecommunication (GSM)

This is obviously new in the communication system in Nigeria compared to the Western countries. However with the registration of SIM cards, the activities of insurgents, terrorists and other criminals could be monitored and culprits brought to book. Suspects' conversations should be tapped for proper follow-ups.

Use of miniature cameras

Miniature television cameras should be mounted to record, monitor and follow up activities of criminals, thereby identifying tendencies, culprits, groups and gangs. A picture could tell a thousand stories.

Other strategies include:

- 1). The presentation of messages in the form of songs, poems, comedy, narration or a combination of these.
- 2). Local languages should be used in messages delivered in local areas for proper understanding and mobilization.

- 3). The benefits of peace and reconciliation should be emphasized.
- 4). Mediation, arbitration (NOT NEGOTIATION) should be adopted, while security apparatuses should be used to physically tackle the problem frontally, where necessary.
- 5). The media should be diplomatic with reports of the number of casualties recorded during clashes so as not to instigate criminals, insurgents and terrorists against the citizens, security agents and government.

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Conclusion

Conflict in a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-dimensional nation like Nigeria is quite expected. But insurgency and terrorism have taken conflict beyond tolerable limits as "the handshake that goes beyond the elbow". In managing conflict, it is pertinent to identify the other party, but there could be a dicey situation in which the other party is faceless, inhuman and barbaric. Even with the ready counter-attacks by the security forces, insurgents and other criminals seem determined to cripple the nation with unprovoked attacks and unwarranted clashes. It is therefore obvious that some conflicts have no agenda other than the ones in the minds of the perpetrators which are not in the interest of the human race.

Communication, using both traditional and modern media could be utilized for adequate management of conflict. The manner of presentation of messages is important to the effectiveness of the message. Various forms and patterns of communication should be applied to reach the target audiences – insurgents, terrorists, vandals, victims, security agents, governments and others. However, there should be no negotiation with mindless, faceless and unidentified inhuman groups in any conflict situation. As inevitable as it is, and as unproductive as it is, conflict should demonstrate clear objectives and philosophy.

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