

CONFLICTS BETWEEN LINE AND STAFF EMPLOYEE AND THE ACHIEVEMENT OF ORGANISATIONAL GOAL AND OBJECTIVES: A STUDY OF UNIVERSITY OF CALABAR TEACHING HOSPITAL

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Abstract

This study was carried out to determine the effect of line and staff conflict on achievement of organizational goal and objectives at the University of Calabar Teaching Hospital, Calabar. To analyse the null hypothesis, 226 subjects were chosen accidentally. The test of hypothesis using Pearson Product Moment Correction Coefficient (r) at 0.05 significant level reveal no significant relationship between line and staff conflict and the achievement of organizational goal and objectives, despite incessant strikes at the hospital. The study recommended improvement in funding and implementation of government wages and allowance policies as at when due in order to evade the incessant strikes.

Keywords: Line, Staff, Organisation, Conflict, Goal and Objective.

BACKGROUND

Health institutions in general and tertiary health institutions in particular provide practical examples of line and staff employees' relationship in formal organizations. How this relationship is managed impact directly on the organization's performance in terms of realization of its set goal and objectives. Industrial dynamics presented by tertiary health institutions make them one of the most appropriate organizations for the analysis of line and staff relationship.

The Nigerian Health Care delivery system comprises three levels; the primary, secondary and tertiary health care providers. The primary health care providers within the system comprise clinics, comprehensive health centres and health posts under the management of local governments. The secondary Health Care system under the management of state government primarily and federal government as the need arises and usually as a model for emulation. These comprises of general and cottage hospitals. The tertiary health care comprises of such institutions as Teaching Hospitals, Specialist hospitals as well as Health research institutions.

Personnels in the tertiary system are: Medical Doctors, Nurses, Pharmacists, Ophthalmologists, Medical Laboratory Scientists, Physiotherapists, Health Administrators, Psychologists, Medical Social Workers/ Rehabilitation Therapists and a great diversity of other health workers with diverse training and expertise.

The tertiary health institution was considered the most appropriate level of study/analysis in this research because of the great diversity of professionals, who constitute themselves into different groups in order to foster their distinctive identity within an organization. It is a complex organization due to multiplicity of distinct workgroups interacting with one another in order to achieve set goals. This present a form of interlocking relationships which criss-cross the various specialized groups on the one hand and between their specialized groups and management on the other hand. This web of relationship has brought with it a catalogue of industrial problems and conflicts experienced within the tertiary health institutions in Nigeria. The University of Calabar Teaching Hospital is a case study of these complex relationships and the attendant consequences of work group conflict which is likely to impact upon organizational goal attainment.

CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS AND REVIEW

Line: This refers to employees in an organization whose functions are those which have direct responsibility for accomplishing the objectives of the enterprises, and reflect a relationship in which a superior exercises a direct supervision over the subordinates. In the Teaching hospital setting for instance, Medical Doctors (consultants, Registrars/Residents Doctors, Medical Officers) are considered as line personnel, for their functions directly correlates with the goals and objectives of the Teaching Hospital Organization, namely; Health Care delivery, training and research,

Staff: This refers to employees in an organization who function towards providing conducive environment and assistance to line employees to work most effectively in order to accomplish the primary objectives of an organization. Staff perform advising role to line employees in order of authority within the organization. Paramedical personnels like nurses, pharmacists, physiotherapists, radiologists, medical laboratory scientists, Health administrators and planners, as well as non medical personnels like technicians, artisans, social workers, psychologists, clerical and engineers are all staff personnel.

Conflict: This has to do with behaviour by persons or groups purposefully designed to inhibit the attainment of goals by another person or group. Reggio (1999) stressed that conflicting parties have incompatible goals, and that conflict may have positive or negative consequences.

Goals and Objectives: Goals refer to the objectives, ambition or effort. It is the point an organization aspire to attain. Objective is something sought after or aimed at. As indicated earlier, the objectives of Teaching Hospitals are healthcare delivery, training and research.

Hodgetts (1990) maintains that as organization acquire higher complexity, line personnel alone become inadequate, and as a result, staff relationship are created to deal with expanding demands of complexity; for example, lawyers are employed to provide legal services for purely health organizations. Hodgetts (1990) further explains that when there are two or more groups in the organization, there exists the likelihood of conflict. In this regard, this study was designed to examine the possibility of conflict between line and staff work groups and personnel and the possible impact on achieving goal and objectives by hospital organization which, at tertiary level like a Teaching Hospital, is very complex in nature.

Haimann and Hilgert (1997) attested that many of the difficulties and frictions encountered in the daily life of an organization are due to line and staff problems. To them, misconceptions, distrust, conflict of personalities, disunity and duplication of effort arising from line and staff conflict inflict upon organizational ability to operate efficiently and effectively maximizing its goal and objectives. Dalton (1950) classical study of line and staff conflict maintains that power struggle plays a significant role in the process of adjustment to changes in organization arising from complex working relationship in line and staff organizations. Blau and Scott (1962) reviewing Dalton (1950) study, identified diversity of front of conflicts in complex organizations to include; intra-staff conflicts which prevail among staff officers of various specialties; intra-line conflict which prevail among line officers of various specialties; and line and staff conflicts, which prevail between line and staff personnel and their work groups. This study focused on line and staff conflict. It reveals the extent of conflict in Teaching hospital organization arising as a result of complexity in line and staff group relationship. It examines specifically the effect of such conflict if any in hospital setting on organizational goal attainment and objective realization.

The aim of which was to provide solution on reducing or eliminating conflict in order to achieve set goal and objectives, which will pave way for growth, expansion and development of hospital organizations.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The group equilibrium theory attempts to explain how power can be distributed equitably among groups in any given social setting to avoid conflict which could threaten the survival of the social setting. The mean assumption is that there are different groups in the society pursuing different interests and competing to translate such interests into policies. Each group pursues its own narrow self-interest and its interest may conflict with that of another. Therefore, there is perpetual conflict among groups. Egonwan (1993) noted that groups are not equal, but have some resources, which give them weight and leverage in the scheme of things. Associational groups are highly specialized like trade unions in the hospital such as: Medical and Dental Consultant Association of Nigeria (MDCAN), Association of Resident Doctors (ARD), Medical and Health Workers Union (MHWUN), and Senior Staff Association. The goal of group equilibrium theory is its attempt to provide 'balance of the interest of the group's pressures' for the survival and continuity of the system. It is on this strength that the theory was adopted to guide the study.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted ex-post facto survey design to investigate the possible cause and effect of relationship by observing consequences of an event, after its occurrence. The independent variable was line and staff conflict, while the dependent variable was achievement of organizational goal and objectives. The population of the study covers the entire staff strength of the University of Calabar Teaching Hospital being 2185 (Two thousand, one hundred and eighty-five) employees (UCTH, 2005).

A sample of 226 subjects was randomly chosen being employees of the hospital comprising medical doctors, administrators, technical personnel, nurses, pharmacists, physiotherapists, laboratory scientists, health assistants, medical recorders, radiographers, **and** medical social workers. A total number of 226 copies of the questionnaire were administered on the subject and returned back based on continuous check back and follow-up for a period of two weeks. The instrument was designed in three parts, namely demographic and structured questions requiring Very Strongly Agree (VSA), Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), Strongly Disagree (SD) and Very Strongly Disagree (VSD), a six points rating r-scale. The last section consisted of 3 open ended question.

One main hypothesis guided the study, which in the null form states: "there is no significant relationship between line and staff, employee conflicts and the achievement of organizational goals and objectives". Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient Test was conducted to determine the validity of this hypothesis. The data obtained were manually coded in view of the sample size, and that informed the study's conclusion.

UNIVERSITY OF CALABAR TEACHING HOSPITAL: A BRIEF HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

The hospital was established in 1979 following the need for a tertiary health institution that will render clinical services at a level that meets requirement for training of clinical medical students of the Medical College of the University of Calabar. The University of Calabar Teaching Hospital started with the facilities of St. Margaret's Hospital and Maternity established in 1897 which were both taken over by the Federal Government which as a matter of constitutional rights owns University of Calabar Teaching Hospital. The main functions of the hospital includes:

1. The development of manpower at undergraduate and post graduate levels;
2. Teaching and research; and
3. Health care delivery and patients' care.

There are six directorates for the administration of the hospital and seven training schools. The hospital is governed by a Management Board and the Chief Medical Director is the Chief Executive Officer of the organization as specified by Decree No. 10 of 1985 now Act of National Assembly. The Chief Medical Director is assisted by Chairman Medical Advisory Council who is appointed from among Medical consultant (also a Doctor). All other cadre of staff, work on advisory role to the Medical Doctors in the hospital, as only a Medical Doctor is empowered by law to be the Chief executive. The following work groups assist in the hospital as indicated in table 1.

Table I: Classification of Employees and Associational Groups in University of Calabar Teaching Hospital

S/N	Associational Group Name	Group Classification
1.	Medical and Dental Consultant Association of Nigeria (MDCAN)	Medical Doctors Consultants only
2.	Association of Resident Doctors of Nigeria (ARD)	Residents and Senior-House Officers (Medical Doctors)
3.	Nigerian Medical Association	Medical Officers and House Officers - Doctors
4.	National Association of Nigerian Nurses and Midwives	Nurses
5.	Medical and Health Workers Union of Nigeria (MHWUN)	Junior Staff - General
6.	Senior Staff Association of University Teaching Hospital, Research and Associated Institutions (SSAUTHRIA)	All Senior Staff - Admin., Technical and paramedical.

Source: University of Calabar Teaching Hospital Records, 2004.

Table 2: Personnel Statistics University of Calabar Teaching Hospital 2005

Category of Employees	No. in Employment	Percentage (%)
Doctors	178	8.15
Nurses	524	23.98
Other paramedical	638	29.20
Admin/tech. staff	845	38.67
Total	2,185	100%

Source: University of Calabar Teaching Hospital, Nominal Roll and Estimate (2005).

From table 2, line employees who performed the basic function of the organization are in the minority, but they dominate strategic decision making positions in the hospital and exercise functional authority, while the majority were staff employee. Between 1999 and 2003 all the unions in the hospital embarked on strikes for various reasons, being the outcome of unsettled conflict condition amongst them.

Table 3: Strikes in The University of Calabar Teaching Hospital (1999 - 2003)

Industrial Unions	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	Total Duration
ARD	2	-	2	1	1	18 months
NANNM	-	-	1	1	1	8 months
SSAUTHHRAI	-	-	1	1	1	9 months
M.H.W.A.	-	-	1	1	1	8 months
Total annual No. of strikes	2		5	4	4	43 months 15 strikes

Source: Data obtained from ARD, NANNM and SSAUTHHRIA Records 2004.

Table 3 indicates that all the unions in the hospital had embarked on strike between 1999 and 2003. The issue therefore is, what is the implication of strikes, on the performance of the hospital in terms of attainment of her goal and objectives? The high number of strikes reveals a state of conflict, instability and unrest as against peace and harmony. This paper attempts to answer this pertinent question, in the context of whether the strikes were as a result of conflict between line and staff groups, and if strike affects the hospital performance

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

Since this study involved analysis of Associational group conflict respondents were analysed in terms of their professional affiliation thus:

Table 4: Professional Affiliation

Professional Group	Doctors			Paramedical					Admin./Tech			Journal Cadre				
	Medical officers	Consultant	Resident Doctors	Nurses	Physiotherapists	Lab. Scientists	Med. Soc. Workers	Pharmacists	Radiologists	Admin./Executive	Clerical/Assistant	Eng./Technician	Con/Sect. and Typo	Labourers	Cleaner	Security Personnel
No. in Group	5	3	20	49	6	14	1	6	10	11	31	15	6	15	28	6
Group Total	28			86					63			49				
%	(12.39%)			(38.05%)					(27.88%)			(21.68%)				

Source: Field Survey 2004 (Conducted before outsourcing of such services as cleaners and security).

Table 4 shows the break down of the respondents into their various professional groups. The Doctors who are line personnel consists of only 12.39% of the respondents, paramedical and non-medical 65.93%, while presently outsourced services consisted of 21.68% of the respondents. This shows coverage of diverse work groups in the hospital as a complex organization.

Testing of the null hypothesis:

H₀: There is no significant relationship between line and staff employee conflict and the achievement of organizational goal and objectives.

Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used for the analysis. The result is presented in table 5. In the analysis "X" represent statement number "1", while "Y" represent statement number "2" in the instrument as below:

Statement 1: Industrial Unions in the hospital frequently embark on strikes.

Statement 2: Incessant strikes in the hospital do affect health care delivery, training and research.

Variables	Ex Ey	Ex² EY²	Exy	Df	r-cal	r-critical
X	867	3754		4062	224	0.2874
Y	1029	5063				.255

Significance level for critical value of r = 0.05

Decision: The obtained r (.285) is greater than the critical value of r(0.05)= .255

Finding: "There is no significant relationship between line and staff, employee conflict and the achievement of organizational goal and objectives. Hence, the null hypothesis was accepted.

This finding indicates that organizational goal and objectives are not hindered irrespective of the existence of conflicts in the organization. Though strikes may affect overall efficiency of an organization, it may not affect its effectiveness. Goal and objectives attainment are indicators of effectiveness not efficiency as noted by Hanson (1972) who asserted that the ability to achieve a set goal and objectives differ from efficiency, as the later has to do with output-input ratio.

Other factors that are likely to influence goal and objectives realization as indicated by the response to open-ended question include: poor funding, inadequate facilities, obsolete equipments, lack of infrastructure, as well as low exposure of personnel to modern health care delivery techniques. The conflicts between line and staff personnel and group was not significant enough to influence effectiveness of hospital organization measured in terms of goal and objectives attainment.

The open ended questions also revealed; non-payment of salary as at when due and allowance at approved rate; irregularity in implementation of government policy; deplorable state of health service facilities and infrastructures among others to be the causes of the persistent strike in the health sector, as against line and staff relationship of conflict.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Teaching Hospitals are very complex in structure and composition. Its human components if not well managed may become obstacles to its very survival in-view of its inability to achieve goal and objectives. This study focused on line and staff groups in a complex organizational setting competing with one another in performing job tasks. The study reveals frequent industrial actions in the hospital setting in form of strikes. The line group in the hospital were doctors while staff group consisted of paramedical and other supporting staff. The aim of the study was to determine the impact of intergroup conflict on achievement of organizational goal and objectives.

The findings reveal that there was no significant relationship between line and staff conflict and achievement of organizational goal and objectives. Though conflict does occur in terms of strikes, it is not due to conflict between line and staff groups. The level of conflict between line and staff groups was not sufficient to deter achievement of goal and objectives which was considered in terms of effectiveness and not efficiency. Other factors as revealed by the study includes the incessant strikes like failure to implement approved policies as at/and when due.

The study recommends that management should ensure equal and humane treatment of all employees whether staff or line, procure modern facilities and equipments; as well as prompt implementation of policies especially salary and allowances related policies which are the main factors that induces industrial disputes resulting to strike actions. When managers of tertiary health organizations adhere to these recommendations, conflicts between work groups and management which is the actual cause of conflict existing in the hospital will be a thing of the past. The study concluded that though conflict exist between work groups (line and staff) in the hospital, the level of such conflict is insignificant to influence goal and objectives achievement,

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