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Conflict Management in Selected Graphic Design Houses in Accra

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Abstract:

Conflict is an evitable human phenomenon which cannot be eliminated completely. This is because human beings are interactive creatures coming from different cultural, social and economic backgrounds. The understanding and interpretation of issues will differ, which will lead to disagreements from time to time. Traditionally, conflict was regarded as negative and should be eliminated; interestingly, some form of conflict is needed for change to occur. Graphic Design houses in Accra (Ghana), as human institutions are bound to have conflicts. The question therefore is how are these conflicts managed? The study therefore sought to find out the perception of conflict in the selected graphic design houses and the conflict management approaches used in managing conflicts in the design houses. The study also examined the effect of perception, emotion, and communication on conflict as well as its management focusing on five ways of handling conflict based on Blake and Moutons (1964) dual concern model for managing conflict. The study revealed that the selected design houses were aware of existing conflict management styles and acknowledged the proper management of conflict impacted on the wealth of the design house. They also acknowledged perception, emotions and communication were variables that could influence the course of a conflict situation which may affect the outcome of the conflict.

Keywords: Conflict, conflict management, Blake and Moutons dual concern model, graphic design house

1. Introduction

Society keeps evolving which requires a certain amount of change, and change more often than not comes with a degree of conflict. Conflict is inevitable because humans are interactive beings with varying backgrounds, opinions and approaches to managing various issues; whether in the home, office or organizations, communication can't be avoided. The varying interpretations and understandings we give to communication oftentimes bring about conflict which can sometimes lead to discrimination against another person (CIPD, 2020). People often regard conflict as a depressing, destructive occurrence and not as a natural and constant occurrence in their day-to-day activities (Boonsathorn, 2007). Conventionally, the presence of conflict within an organization indicates the existence of a problem such as opposing views and decisions which needs attention. However, conflict when properly handled or harnessed would lead to organizational improvement and growth (Hellriegel, Slocum, & Woodman, 1995). Higgerson (1996) indicates that conflicts are not always destructive; importantly, some conflict is desirable; constructively, conflict can help solve problems, highlight problems, increase involvement and commitment of employees resulting in improved outcomes. Consequently, diversity in conflict helps to effectively promote policies thus ensuring the understanding of intricate issues for eminent solutions (Amason, 1996) and (Bourgeois & Eisenhardt, 1988). On the other hand, conflict when ignored and left unresolved will intensify and aggravate leading to a loss, this is because conflict will not go away by itself thus making it impossible to eliminate (Fredenburg, 2010). Though some form of conflict is expected, the results cannot be pre-determined therefore the discernment of threat of conflict calls for the introduction of conflict management methods such as avoiding, collaborating, compromising, dominating and accommodating (Fredenburg, 2010). Thus, it is important to establish clear Policy Guidelines, Procedures and Agreements for specific events and occurrences and tasks in order to avoid conflicts to help create harmonious working environments.

2. The Problem and Aims of Study

Swanström and Weissmann (2005) assert that conflict is dynamic and the management of it is a progressive process which involves continuous dialogue and supervision as well as the selection of appropriate combination of tools with appropriate timing. Additionally, conflict requires flexibility and regular evaluation which can be harnessed for effective and productive results (Borisoff & Victor, 1998). As stated by Cloke (2011) 'every conflict we face in life is rich with positive and negative potential'. Conflict can be a source of inspiration, enlightenment, learning, transformation and growth or rage, fear, shame, entrapment and resistance. Parties involved in a conflict have a choice to work through them or not.

Graphic design houses in Ghana, just like any human institutions are bound to have conflicts. How conflicts are managed in these institutions could either impact negatively or positively on the productivity of these design houses, the study therefore aimed to

- Find out the perception of conflict in the selected graphic design houses
- Find out the conflict management approaches used in managing conflicts in the design houses.

3. Related Literature

Organizations are widely known to be fertile ground for conflict and contention of different kinds ranging from non-attendance to discrimination (Noon & Blyton, 1997). This is supported by research in the organizational behavioural field (OB) that reveals that conflict in organizations are prevalent, though they are sometimes limited in the conception of it. In OB as constituted at present, conflict behaviour is possibly most commonly regarded as 'organizational *mis* behaviour' (Ackroyd & Thompson, 1999) with other tags such as 'workplace deviance' (Robinson & Bennett, 1995), 'antisocial behaviour' (Giacalone & Greenberg, 1997) and 'flawed behaviour' (Griffin, O'Leary Kelly, & Collins, 1998). Clearly, some of these *labels* mean that labour recognises differences within various interests which could be defective or wrong. At a reasonable height, conflict is often perceived as the result of diverse personalities and individual disparities, poor management etc.

3.1. Types of Conflict

There are two fundamental views about conflict; functional and dysfunctional. The traditional view of conflict is that it is dysfunctional (Pondy, 1967), harmful with negative outcomes, such as distortion, withholding of information to the disadvantage of others within an organisation, antagonism, and distrust during interactions (Thomas, 1990) related to opportunistic behaviour (Barclay, 1991) that could obstruct decision-making (Ruekert & Walker, 1987) and emerge as a barrier to conformity and affective recognition (Barr & Dowding, 2012).

Positively, conflict can be used to stimulate and encourage change to eliminate stagnation, increase productivity, and inspire critical thinking. Pondy (1992) supports this by encouraging the involvement of varying perspectives and positive ideas to improve team performance and innovation. Additionally, negotiation and problem solving, which includes manager mediation, can successfully help in deescalating conflict situations (McConnon & McConnon, 2010). Thus, conflicts need to be reassessed from time to time by management who should consider factors such as emotions, behaviours and possible outcomes (Thomas, 1992). Importantly, conflict brings to bare diversity and divergence, that helps to promote mutual respect among colleagues, encourages dialogue and negotiations, and improves understanding of roles (McConnon & McConnon, 2010) and (Barr & Dowding, 2012).

3.1.1. Functional Conflict

Functional conflict also referred to as cognitive conflict (Amason & Schweiger, 1994) gives an indication of healthy and dynamic challenge of information, values, and assertions (Baron, 1991). Cognitive conflict refers to the affirmative form of conflict that exists in ground-breaking and flourishing organizations (Eisenhardt & Bourgeois, 1988). Individual departments in such organizations exhibit an eagerness to consider new ideas, wholly accept changes made by other departments and also propose creative ideas to others within the organization (Barclay, 1991) through useful give and take dialogue expressed without restraint (Eisenhardt & Bourgeois, 1988). Consequently, functional conflict encourages careful deliberation of choices and assumptions underlying decisions, thus enhancing the quality of decisions made consequently creating a stronger commitment to particular strategies (Cosier & Dalton, 1990).

3.1.2. Dysfunctional Conflict

Reviewed literature states dysfunctional conflict in the traditional sense as harmful and related to flawed behaviours, discontent, and appalling individual or group performance likely driven by emotions which are fixated on personal disparities or disagreements (Priem & Price, 1991). Also known as affective conflict (Amason & Schweiger, 1994), dysfunctional conflict occurs in organizations when differences in opinions are seen as attack on personality which can turn disagreements into full scale emotional conflicts resulting in distrust that could trigger personal and affective conflict, thereby promoting distrust and avoidance of efforts that could destabilize peace and endanger the quality of decisions made (Barclay, 1991).

3.2. Effect of Conflict on Organization

Functional cognitive conflict and dysfunctional affective conflict makes it easier to understand in general the effects of conflict on strategic decision making. Organizations may accidentally trigger affective conflict while engaged in cognitive conflict. While cognitive conflict and affective conflict often occur together, extreme levels of conflict can obstruct organizational efficiency which may be evident through reduced job satisfaction by employees, increased absenteeism which may affect revenue rates, and ultimately result in lower productivity.

Though conflict is a catalyst for change, it is often viewed from a negative point of view. However, no organization can survive when there is no change, and conflict stimulates change (Pondy, 1967). Disagreement in ideas, disappointment with conditions, apprehension about doing things better, and the eagerness to improve insufficiencies are all agents of change. In fact, conflict is often healthy, a catalyst of change and not inherently destructive, importantly, some conflict is desirable (Higgerson, 1996). Constructively, conflict can improve problem solving, clarify issues or expectations,

increase participant involvement and commitment and result in better decisions by helping the effective implementation of policies by promoting understanding of complex issues and the development of quality solutions (Amason, 1996).

3.3. Sources of Conflict

Freud hypothesised that conflict formed part of human nature, with focus on the individual and his act rather than the context of the act (Schellenberg, 1996). On the other hand, Darwinist attribute conflict to competition among humans in society based on the survival of the fittest mind-set which analyzed conflict as part of a natural universal struggle borne out of aggressive tendencies. In Jung's (2003) view, conflict is a clear association with power which can develop when organizational goals are avoided and not achieved. Also, factors such as scarcity, obstruction and incompatible interests or goals can also generate conflicts. Additionally, conflicts may result from differences in definition of priority, personality, communication, organizational politics, administrative procedures, resource allocations, scheduling, leadership styles, vague roles, varied opinions, as well previously unresolved conflicts (Kezsbom, 1992)

On the other hand, Katz (1964) identifies three sources of conflict which are; *structural conflict* that arises out of the need to manage the interdependence between different organizational sub-units; *role conflict* that arises from sets of prescribed behaviour and *resources conflict* that results from interest groups competing for organizational resources.

Putnam and Poole's (1987) view of conflict is taken from a dialoguers' viewpoint which identifies communication as one of the five constituents of 'conflict conditions'; the others being person attributes (e.g., values, abilities, reasoning), conflict apprehensions, relationship variables (trust, power, interdependency), however, Easterbrook, Beck, Goodlet, Plowman, Sharples and Woode, (1993) classed organizational conflict into four types: interpersonal (e.g. between co-workers or superiors and subordinates), bargaining and negotiation (e.g. between labour and management), intergroup (e.g. between departments), and inter-organizational (e.g. between companies) (Boonsathorn, 2007). This notwithstanding, differences in perspectives can also be a source of organizational conflict relative to the units or parties to a conflict; they perceive, initiate and sustain a conflict. Thus, affecting the course of a conflict and inherently determine the mode of its management.

3.4. Communication and Conflict

Communication is one of the central components of every organization and the key to the overall organizational success. Business communication is usually within and without the organization which involves the transfer of information from one person to the (Hener, 2010), however it is very important that the recipient of the information understands the content and the meaning of the message (Hener, 2010).

Bucăța & Rizescu (2017) postulate that, the purpose of communication in the organization is to bond the employees of that organization for the attainment of mutual goals. Consequently, the importance of communication in the organization is vital because of the (Wehrich & Koontz, 2001)

- Company's goal setting and their implementation,
- Development of plans towards their realization,
- Appropriate management of human and other resources in the most successful way,
- Selection, the growth and the performance evaluation of the organization members,
- Establishment of an appropriate organizational climate by management (such as guiding, motivating) where people are willing to contribute,
- Control over realization.

Communication in an organization is a complex system of the flow of information, orders, wishes and references which comes in two partially complementary systems: formal communication network and informal communication network (Bucăța & Rizescu, 2017).

The process of communication entails several elements: the sender, the message, the medium, and the recipient. Communication flows from the sender which is the source of the communication (whether an individual or a group). The message is sent to the recipient using a particular medium. The medium used during communication within the organization, is dependent on the content and the aim of the message the sender wants to convey to the recipient be it conversations, memos, printouts and schemes. The recipient then attempts to understand the message conveyed by the sender. The communication process may sometimes be interrupted by factors such as noise, grammatical errors etc. which can impede the communication. And poor communication always results in misunderstandings and eventually conflicts. Thus, communication plays a huge role in conflict and its management.

3.5. Perceptions in Conflict

In a dispute, one has already formed an impression of the other person before the time comes to consider procedures for resolving the conflict. Hence, it is possible that person perception processes during the eruption of the dispute influences one's decision about how to resolve the conflict later. Therefore, the sincerity of managements perceptions on issues of conflict and its management greatly impacts on employee responses to organizational conflict (Baron, 1991). Although previous studies suggest that person perception is consequential in conflicts, they do not, converge on a conclusion about the kinds that generally affect conflict decisions.

3.6. Conflict Management Styles and Approaches

There are several ways of managing organizational conflict as there are varied reasons, sources and contexts. The reason for conflict management is to influence the whole structure of a conflict situation so as to control the vicious

components in the conflict process and assist the parties possessing irreconcilable goals to find some solution to their conflict (John-Eke & Akintokunbo, 2020)

Thus, efficient conflict management helps in

- Minimising interference as a result of the availability of a conflict
- Making available a resolution that is suitable and acceptable
- Thereby increasing productivity in the organisation.

Studies in social psychology and organizational behaviour (OB) suggest styles that decrease the numerous tactics of negotiators and managers to several basic styles. Early styles of strategy in conflict (Deutsch, 1973) tagged on the intuitive notion that styles can be ranged from a single dimension starting from selfishness (concern about own outcomes) to cooperativeness (concern about the other party's outcomes). However, a limitation of the single-dimension styles is that they fail to include styles that involve high concern for both self and other. Similar styles that entail neither high concern for self nor other are found in Thomas & Kilmann (1974) and Pruitt & Rubin (1986).

However, the theory of Blake & Mouton (1964) is built on the dual concern style that conflict is handled in diverse ways specifically; withdrawing, smoothing, forcing, problem solving, and compromising. This is built on a high or low apprehension for production and a high or low apprehension for people. Thomas (1976) further explored this model by focusing on the need to satisfy one's concern and the desire to satisfy the other's concerns. Based on Blake and Mouton (1964) and Thomas (1976), Rahim & Bonoma (1979) distinguished the styles of managing conflict in two dimensions; the dual concern model. This model illustrates conflict behaviour as focusing on whether a person has high or low concern for one's own outcomes or high or low concern for the other's outcomes. The five different styles of conflict management involved in crossing these two dimensions are presented and described below.

3.6.1. Integrating or Collaborative Style

Integrating or collaborating style involves high concern for self and the others. It is characterized by a willingness to exchange information openly, to constructively tackle differences, and to make every effort to pursue a solution that will be mutually acceptable (Rahim, 1992) by parties involved in a conflict situation. This calls for the exploitation of skills, information and resources possessed by different parties to help redefine and devise alternative solutions to solve problems (Rahim, 2002). This style is the only strategy that breaks free of the win-lose paradigm and also decreases the level of task conflict and relationship conflict (Friedman, Tidd, Currall, & Tsai, 2000).

3.6.2. Obliging Style

Obliging or accommodating style centres on defending and keeping relationships rather than chasing an outcome that meets the individual's own concerns. This requires low concern for self and high concern for others. It is logical to use an obliging style when the issue of conflict is very important to the party who is right. It is also reasonable to use this style when a party believes that surrendering will provoke more beneficial outcomes because the party has a weak position (Rahim, 2002). Also, some circumstances like time demands may call for the use of an obliging style (Rubin, 1994). Obliging can be seen as a form of winning through losing in such situations. Certainly, in numerous conflicts involving office policies, an accommodating strategy could actually enable individuals to strengthen their future negotiating position by losing in conflicts over issues they do not feel particularly strongly about. Likewise, an individual might adopt an accommodating strategy to ensure balance to negotiations in which the other party has already had to give up several other points. There may be provocation of a backlash in the form of lack of commitment or open resistance, if a winner in a win-lose scenario fails to put forth some effort to accommodate the other party.

3.6.3. Dominating or Controlling Style

This style is a win-lose strategy that ignores the desires and prospects of the other party and pursues personal interest by using forceful tactics (Blake & Mouton, 1964). Further, the approach is adopted when the conflict situation entails everyday subjects or requires that a swift decision is made (Rahim, 2002). In contrast, it is almost impossible to use the competing approach in interpersonal conflict of people working in the same office or organization because both the winner and the loser must continue to work together.

3.6.4. Avoiding Style

This style has modest concern for one's own interest or the other's and could be damaging if one party withdraws from the conflict regardless of the fact that, the issue of conflict at stake is very vital and needs on the spot decision (Rahim, 2002). While this style is usually condemned, it can be quite useful in allowing both parties to cool off or buy time until all the facts of an issue have been gathered.

3.6.5. Compromising Style

Compromising style shows a modest concern for one's own interests and a modest concern for the other's interests. A mutually acceptable outcome is the most desirable tactics to solve conflict using this style which is a give and take situation. Significantly, this style helps in the recognition and differentiation between factual and intricate issues (Rahim, 2002). Compromise is often a helpful tactic when dealing with relatively small concerns.

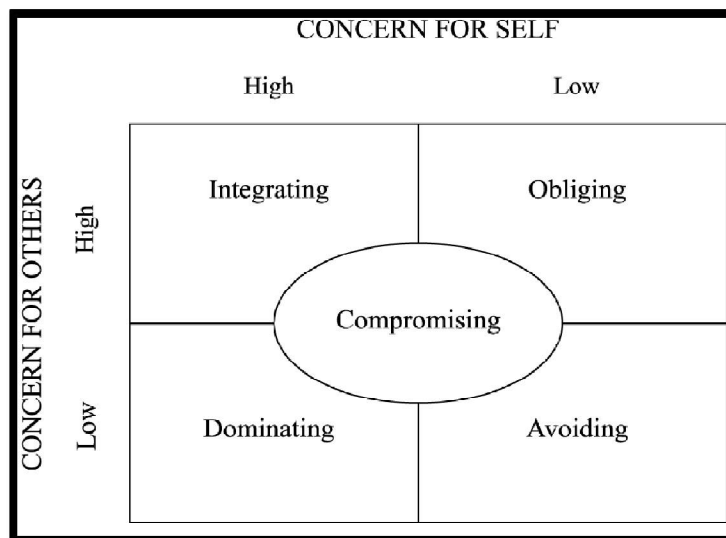


Figure 1: The Dual Concern Model of the Styles of Handling Conflict
Source: Rahim (2002, p.217)

Though managers have the liberty to use all these modes, the collaborating method is the most helpful method for most categories of conflict management. Conflict can be used as a management tool in the collaborating mode. Administrator may use disagreements to guide individuals or groups involved to handle vital problems encountered by the organization. By collaborating, the differing bodies put their creative forces together to find ground-breaking answers to their issues.

This is the main reason the collaborative mode of conflict management differs from the other four conflict-handling modes. Obliging, avoiding, competing, and compromising, which are basically forms of conflict interventions are variations of the win-lose scenario. On the other hand, cooperation as a conflict-handling mode, signifies an effort to direct conflict constructively, hence making it possible for the manager to use conflict as an instrument to resolve otherwise incompatible objectives within the organization.

Apart from the dual concern model, other models for conflict management include the following; distributive bargaining, integrative bargaining and the interactive problem-solving models. All three models may be essential to resolve conflicts successfully. However, for the purpose of this study, the Rahim and Bonoma conflict management styles based on Blake and Mouton and Kilnman will be considered.

4. Research Methodology

4.1. Sampling Design

The research has an inductive approach and was carried out in a short timeframe, making the approach cross-sectional rather than longitudinal (Gray, 2004). The sample for this study comprised of the managers, graphic designers, accountants and marketing executives from Supreme Concept Company Limited DKL Graphics, Xola Digital, Daka, and Design Hub based in Accra. They were selected based on the fact that they worked in the advertising industry and the research was tied to them one way or the other. Stratified random sampling was used in selecting the samples from the large database. Data was obtained through survey questionnaire on conflict and its management. The set of questions were based on perceptions on conflict and the managements approaches used to resolve various conflicts taking into consideration policies and certain variables that affected conflict management. This method helped to provide quantifiable results to aid in the analysis of data statistically (Gray, 2004) and (Järvinen, 2004).

4.2. Data Collection Techniques

Survey research can use several data collection techniques, the most important of which is the questionnaire. In order to facilitate an easy response for the research data and analysis, questionnaires were sent via email. The collection of data this way proved to be cost-effective (Gray, 2004, Creswell, 2003). Follow up was made through phone calls and e-mail.

4.3. Research Instruments

All data used in the study consist of responses to semi-structured and structured questionnaire, and interviews to elaborate on issues and to provide additional information and clarifications for the study (Gray, 2004). The quantitative data obtained from the questionnaires was complemented with qualitative data from interviews. Each respondent was given a maximum of three weeks, after which responses were collected, data extracted, summarized and structured after all interviews were completed (Gray, 2004).

4.4. Data Analysis Techniques

The data was compiled, interpreted and analysed by consequently answering each question related to the objectives of the study (Hart, 2004) with conclusions drawn afterwards. Hart (2004) asserts that 'interpretation is a

cognitive process consisting of making sense of something'. By analysing and interpreting the data a conclusion was formed, supported by facts, theories, and views. The findings from the analysis and interpretations of the data collected are first brought forward through a discussion where it is reviewed and examined. The conclusions were then presented followed by recommendations.

4.5. Population of the Study

Five graphic design houses were selected through random sampling based on the assumption that they each had varied opinions and perception on conflict and its management. For this purpose, survey questionnaires were given to respondents to fill out. In all, twenty-five (25) participants were invited for the questionnaire survey and interviews. The responses were tallied, computed, analysed and recorded based on themes tied to the objectives of the study after the questionnaire were collected.

4.6. Classification of Respondents

The design houses that responded to the questionnaire demonstrated this pattern: all five graphic design houses had less than 20 employees with managers who are university graduates in Graphic Design, Chartered Management Accountant and Communication Studies.

4.7. Conflict Management Policies and Practices

All the five graphic design houses that responded had the Ghana Labour Law manual forming the basis of their managerial policies. Nonetheless, the selected graphic design houses had their own policies for managing conflict depending on the situation prevalent.

4.8. Respondents

Out of the twenty-five (25) participants invited for the study, twenty-one (21) agreed to participate, three (3) delegated the task to other persons in the organization, two (2) declined because they were indisposed, hence, altogether there were twenty-three (23) participants.

Groups	Invited	Interviewed
Managing Directors	5	4
Graphic Designers	8	8
Accountants	5	5
Marketers	7	6
Total	25	23

Table 1: The Number of Respondents from the Selected Graphic Design Houses

Source: Field Work, 2021

5. Results

The findings from the questionnaire and interviews are presented below. In the first interview question, the respondents are classified into five groups in order to highlight the possible differences in their views and opinions. Statements made by more than one respondent are in *italics*.

5.1. Objective 1 – Perception of Conflict in the Selected Graphic Design Houses

Conflict is generally perceived as a negative occurrence which must be avoided; this was evident in the responses for the study because sixty-point nine percent (60.9%) of the respondents; 14 out of 23 considered conflict as being a negative incident; the first thing that came to mind when conflict was mentioned was violence. However, they acknowledged that conflict could impact either negatively or positively on productivity depending on how it was handled. In this respect, conflict could act as a catalyst for change.

5.1.1. Managing Directors

Managing directors emphasized that conflict was based on tension between various parties, differences in beliefs and attitudes towards work. 'Conflict in my view is a situation where two or more people or groups disagree on how to handle certain issues or the way forward'. They were of the opinion that disagreements need not necessarily result into a conflict in a workplace situation. They stated that, conflict sometimes happened between clients and the house; care was taken not to blow issues out of proportion because losing a client could mean losing several others which may seriously affect the profit margin of the design house. Experience they said was the best teacher in handling issues of conflict and it was better to build good relations with all clients; both in-house and out-house.

5.1.2. Graphic Design Department

Designers stated that conflict sometimes resulted from misunderstanding of a brief for a job from a client; 'Certain clients are difficult to please but bringing out the best in a design and making them understand the intricacies of the job calms their tempers and wins the client over with time'. They also noted it was best to hold meetings to discuss work with clients and also find durable solutions that would go a long way into the future as well.

They were of the view that creative designing was changing all the time, with many opportunities for improvement. Thus, one way of improving was constantly upgrading software knowledge to meet client expectation to avoid tension in compatibility in works saved for further processing. Most importantly, as pointed out from responses, a lot of frustration which led to anger resulting in conflict would be avoided if money was invested in buying very good equipment which produced good result in cutting the adverse impacts on efficient output. Responses also revealed that designers have an emotional relationship with clients which must be handled with great care.

5.1.3. Marketing Department

Conflict is an aspect you cannot avoid in the marketing profession, because we always come into contact with people who share different opinions and have different attitudes. Respondents in this department affirmed that the first thing that came to mind when conflict was mentioned was that it was a negative and destructive element to be avoided at all costs so that time was not wasted resolving conflict but spent convincing clients to purchase their products and services.

They asserted clients were very important to the design house and without them the house would run low on finances. Though issues of conflict surfaced all the time, how they were handled either kept or drove the client away. Moreover, it was noted that good relationship was a forerunner to increasing profit margins.

5.1.4. Accounts Department

This department also confirmed the *traditionally view on conflict which is associated with violence and negatively impacting on the parties involved* however, respondents stressed the importance of keeping good relationship with employees in the various departments to keep expenditure in check. In view of this, managing workplace conflict was one of the crucial investments for long-term feasibility and success for a business as pointed out. This is because every organization prides itself in keeping the checks and balances in place which are reflected in the assets acquired and overall productivity at the end of the business year.

More importantly, Conflict as revealed by respondents brought about innovation and collaborative process that required breaking away from old habits, developing new approaches, and implementing them successfully to build the design house.

5.2. Objective 2: Management Approaches Used In Managing Conflict in the Selected Publishing Houses

The types of conflict identified were *interpersonal, interdepartmental and between clients* and the approaches used were based on Blake and Mouton (1964) which focused on the need to satisfy one's concern and the desire to satisfy the other's concerns. This model suggested five styles namely compromising, collaborating, accommodating, avoiding and dominating. These styles were adapted and used depending on the conflict situation. However, though these approaches are available to manage conflict, most of the skills are instilled by the way of upbringing. As stated by Kluger (2011), 'when you learn conflict resolution skills in the playroom, you then practice them on the playground and that in turn stays with you'.

To find out whether there were policies that helped to manage and resolve conflicts, the Managing Directors were invited to answer the following interview questions in the selected graphic design houses.

5.2.1. Do You Have Policies in Place for Managing Issues of Conflict?

Yes, we do. But basically, the Ghana Labour Law forms the basis of our managerial policies. Therefore, any policy formulated or developed is structured in line with the Ghana Labour Law. Consequently, all policies are structured in line with the Ghana Labour Law.

Where there is any grievance that could lead to any conflict, we have various steps in handling them. The steps are presented below:

- Step 1. Employee must report the grievance to his immediate superior for redress not later than 5 days after its occurrence. If grievance is not addressed satisfactorily,
- Step II. She or he must report to his head of department. If not satisfied,
- Step III. The employee and his representative must report to the HR Manager or Managing Director for redress. If not satisfied,
- Step IV. HR Manager or Managing Director will form a sub-committee to redress if not satisfied,
- Step V. Issue will be referred to the Standing Negotiation Committee that is made up of a group of selected persons from the publishing house and labour union. If the aggrieved person is still not satisfied, the issue can then be referred to the National Labour Commission or a mutually accepted third party.

5.2.2. Why Do You Use the Ghana Labour Law?

'We use the Ghana Labour Law because it is the basic law that generally governs and regulates the labour relations in Ghana'. However, the parties could agree on some conditions they deem better than what is stated in the law, provided it does not go against the fundamental law of the land and the labour law itself.

The following graphs represent the preference of conflict management styles and percentages of preferences of the various departments and managing directors from the selected graphic design houses put together with an interpretation of their preferences.

5.2.2.1. Managing Directors' Choice of Conflict Management Style

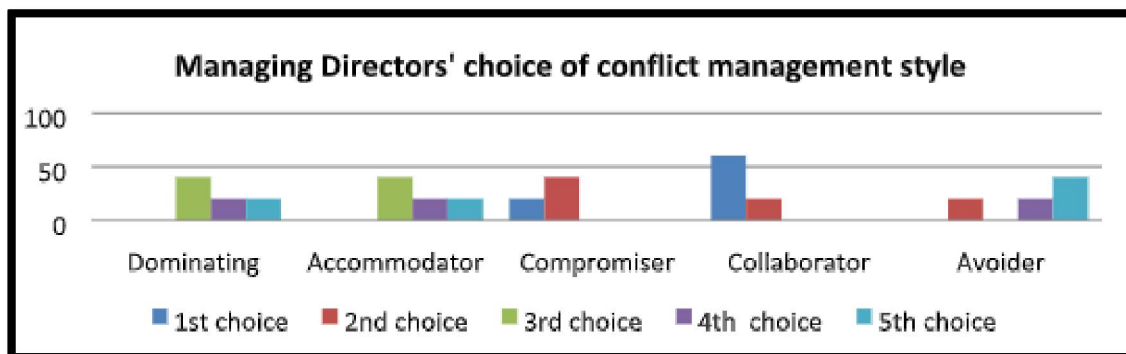


Figure 2: Managing Directors' Choice of Conflict Management Style in the Various Graphic Design Houses
Source: Field Work, 2021

Figure 2 clearly indicates 60% of Managing Directors in the various graphic design houses were highly concerned about themselves and the people they worked with. They readily exchanged information openly, constructively tackled differences and made efforts to pursue solutions mutually acceptable to all to decrease conflict levels in the workplace through collaborations. 20% would compromise as a first choice by showing modest concern for others interest and their own to come out with solutions acceptable to all. As a last option, 20% of the Managing Directors will accommodate by protecting and maintaining relations rather than pursuing outcomes in their own interest, while 20% chose to control situations by ignoring the needs of the other party involved by using forceful tactics, whereas 40% chose to avoid by withdrawing altogether showing little concern for themselves and others.

5.2.2.2. Graphic Design Departments' Choice of Conflict Management Style

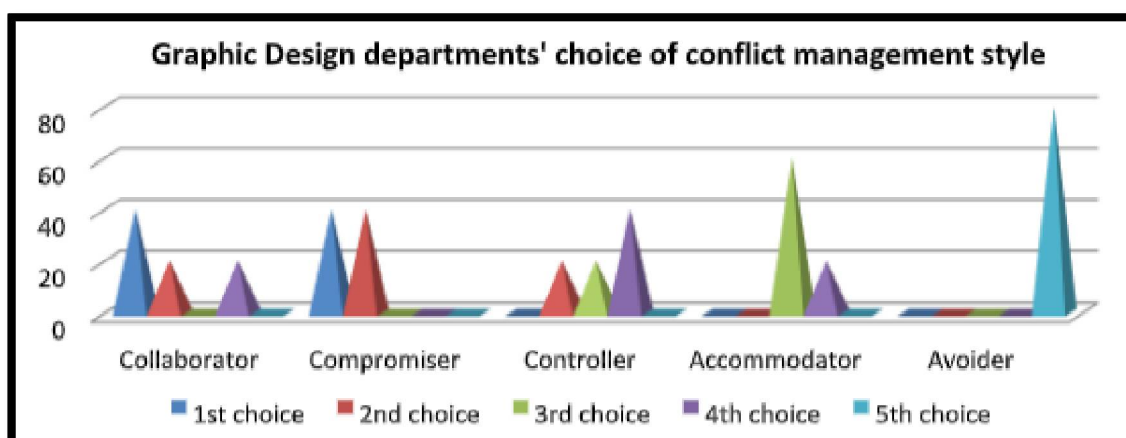


Figure 3: The Various Graphic Design Departments' Choice of Conflict Management Styles
Source: Field Work, 2021

Figure 3 represents the graphic design departments' choice of conflict management style and percentage of preferences. Evidently, 40% of the designers as a first option would both protect and maintain relationships by accommodating a conflict situation believing that pursuing the situation might cause them to lose any benefits they stand to gain or compromise to mutually accept an outcome desirable to parties involved in a conflict situation which might fail to identify the actual issue at hand. As a last resort, 80% of designers in the design houses choose to avoid a conflict situation having little concern for themselves or others regardless of the issues at stake which may require on the spot decision.

5.2.2.3. Marketing Departments' Choice of Conflict Management Style

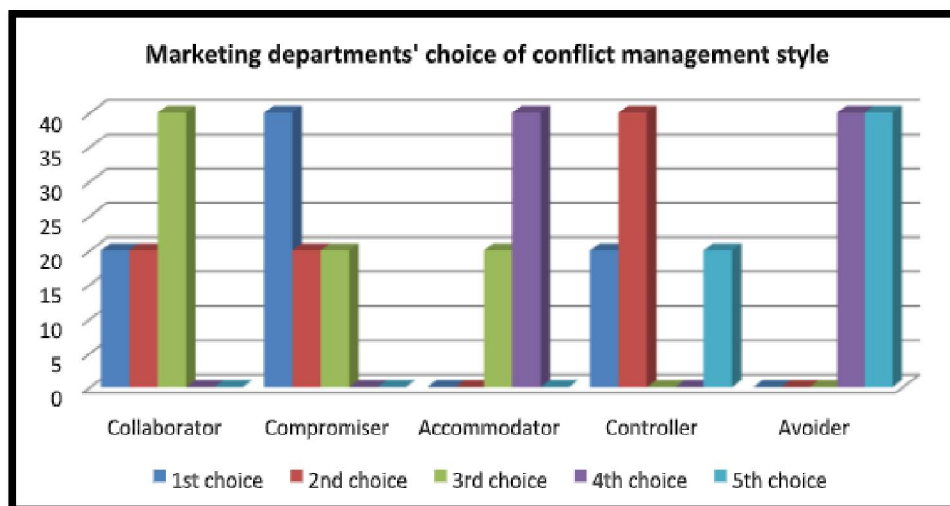


Figure 4: Marketing Departments' Choice of Conflict Management Styles
Source: Field Work, 2021

Analysis from figure 4 indicates that, personnel in the marketing department adapt a particular style to manage a conflict depending on the issue at stake at a particular point in time. 20% as a first choice chose to collaborate to come out with a solution which will in essence decrease the level of task and relationship conflict while 40% as a first option would rather compromise by finding a mutually acceptable decision with both parties benefiting and at the same time failing to identify the real and complex issue(s) at stake. On the other hand, 40% would withdraw from a conflict as a last option having little concern for themselves or any other person involved in the situation which could be damaging.

5.2.2.4. Accounting Departments' Choice of Conflict Management Style

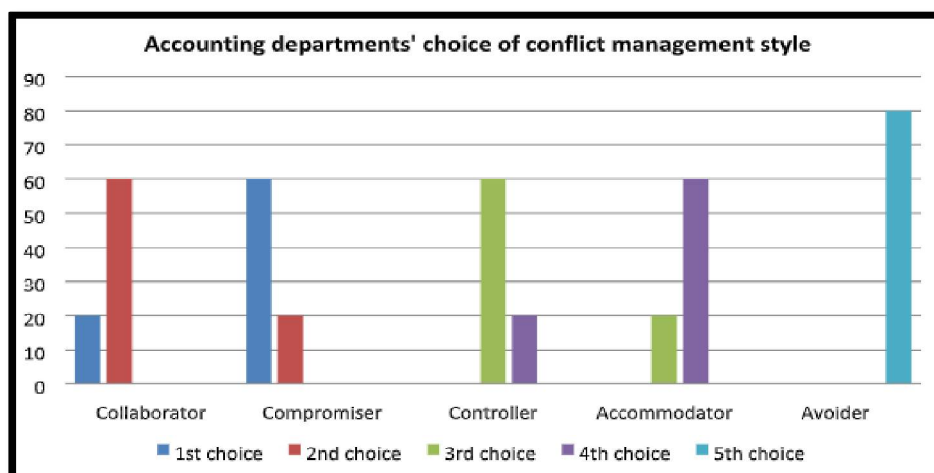


Figure 5: The Various Accounting Departments' Choice of Conflict Management Styles
Source: Field Work, 2021

Figure 5 indicate that 20% of personnel in the accounting department would also collaborate showing high concern for themselves and parties involved in a conflict situation to find a solution with 60% compromising by showing modest concern for themselves or others to accept an approach mutually accepted by all as a first alternative. 80% would avoid a conflict situation as last option when all else has failed regardless of the outcome having little concern for their own interest and that of others involved.

6. Conclusion

Conflict can either be functional or dysfunctional depending on how its potentials are harnessed. Handling conflict appropriately in organisations would positively impact the wealth of any organisation thereby creating conducive atmosphere for employees to work thus ensuring that everyone plays his or her part in the organisation to the advantage of all. This guarantees that the organisation thrives and lives on for the benefit of generations to come. Conflict and dispute generally do not exist without a pre-existing perception problem, and this is no different in graphic design houses. When there is perception during conflict, the two people involved each believe they have irreconcilable interests. It is thus very essential to identify the source of the conflict before it turns ugly to maintain productivity and growth of the publishing

house. Additionally, it is valuable to emotionally engage with an individual or group to help in establishing constructive and useful relationship; this should be regardless whether an experience is alleged as positive or negative, in spite of the outcome.

On the hand, communication was discovered to help in managing conflict; management's daily dialogue with staff can help to decrease disagreements and thereby set the stage for effective conflict management within various departments. Leaders or managers in the graphic design houses use motivation to get their employees to deliver high producing results. Depending on the leadership qualities of the manager, he could get the most or very little from his employees.

Thus, the question as to whether the various conflict management models and implementation of policies on conflict have a significant role to play in the growth and productiveness of the local graphic design houses in Accra was answered through the investigation carried out as all participants recognised the importance of conflict management, however, their awareness of resolving issues of conflict varied.

Consequently, Managing Directors played a major part in whatever decision was taken during conflict resolution. Compared to workers in the various departments, the Managing Directors were more informed about policies on conflict and implementation of such policies.

Accordingly, it was important from time to time to run courses in conflict management, not only for managers but for the various departments to equip them with knowledge; skills and abilities on how to handle issues of conflict so that, the managers would be relieved of attending to all sorts of conflict issues including trivial ones.

Conflict has and will always prevail so long as relationships exist between humans. How it is handled will determine how fruitful and effective it will be. An increasing awareness and concern for issues of conflict will well play an important role by strengthening the position of an organization at least in some niche markets. As graphic designers are preparing to expand their businesses and go into partnership with foreign graphic design houses, it is a sustainable approach to learn and develop the skill of handling and maintaining clients; both in-house and out-house.

Lastly, conflict is an agent of change and some amount of conflict is desired to spur the change needed to achieve organizational goals and bring about reforms.

7. Recommendations

This study indicated that conflict management awareness and sustainable practices were on different levels in different departments. The following recommendations are made for further research concerning this study:

The detection and proper interpretation of variables such as perception, emotions of workers and good communication contribute effectively to the implementations of conflict management policies. Consequently, if parties involved in a conflict situation are educated enough to understand the various conflict management styles, then there will be greater awareness without people feeling their personalities are under attack which could lead to a boost in productivity and would generate an ambience of harmony and belonging. On the other hand, poorly managed conflict could put a strain on productivity in organizations such as graphic design houses.

Consequently, Graphic Designers should come together as an association and organise training on the implementation of conflict management policies for both employees and client beyond their usual day to day activities. This is because there is the need to give employees and client some kind of basic training in conflict management to equip them during conflict situations, to help bond the various units and clients in the graphic design and advertising industry. Additionally, all stakeholders should establish a common forum for advancing conflict management responsibility seeking redress for issues of conflict and practices. The forum could commence information campaigns, promote the exchange of information between stakeholders and carry out studies on relevant topics.

Lastly, conflict should never be seen as negative but rather management should endeavour to turn conflict situations into positive, productive situations through transparency and fairness to all workers under their supervision. Conflict is an agent of change and could be harnessed for organisational growth and productivity. No change means death of the organization!

8. References

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