Assessing the Nature of Conflict and Conflict Resolution Mechanisms at Workplaces, the case of some selected Governmental Institution in Gondar Town, Northwestern Ethiopia.

Aklilu Yohannes;
Department of Civics Ethical Studies, University of Goundar, Ethiopia
E-Mail: akliluyohannes@yahoo.com

Abstract
Conflict often happen at work places. This study aimed at assessing the nature of conflict and conflict resolution mechanism at work places in Gondar town. The study has other specific objectives of assessing the causes of conflict, type and contribution of conflict resolution mechanism that are being used for reducing or settling dispute.

The research is exploratory accordingly a qualitative approach was used. Both primary and secondary data was used as a source of information. Interview was used to collect primary data. Primary data was gathered and analyzed from concerned government officials, and civil servants working in key positions. Secondary data was collected from discipline committee and police records. The data was analyzed by using qualitative techniques. The findings from this study revealed that conflict is being a chronic challenge at workplaces. Besides, criticisms, gossip, accusation and misconduct among workers are identified as the main causes of workplace conflicts. Moreover, the study has depicted that workers discontent; poor moral fiber, and lack of implementation are also prominent factors of workplace conflicts. Moreover, the absence of good conflict prevention and resolution mechanisms at the workplaces highly contribute for the commonness of conflict at the workplaces.

Background of study
Conflict can be conceptually defined as disagreement between two or more than two parties in which one or all perceives a denial or right which leads to squabble and violent action resulting in the persons/parties emotional and physical damage (Galtung, 1996). Moreover, as Wenden (1995) depicted inegalitarian and discriminatory practices can be imposed on individuals or groups in a systematic and organized ways by institutions.

When conflict occurs in the workplace, it can reduce morale, lower work productivity, increase absenteeism, and cause large scale confrontations that can lead to serious and violent crimes (Hart, 2009).

Whenever workers compete for scarce resources, recognition and power in the companies conflict may occur since every one requires a share of resources (office space, supplies the basis of time or funding to compete for their jobs (Hart, 2009).

Conflicts can be managed and resolved through mutual agreements. Jeong (1999) has explicited conflict resolution as a set of process or activities channeled towards addressing the root causes of a conflict. Jeong (1999) defined conflict resolution as referring to processes aimed at addressing the causes of conflict and building a new and lasting relationship between hostile parties.

Conflicts in Ethiopia could easily be handled at the grass-root levels by the societies themselves without the direct intervention of the government. They had been able to sustain themselves without necessitating to have copied neither the Western modes of governance nor their mechanisms of conflict resolution (Knife.2007).
Several researches have conducted a research regarding conflict and conflict resolution mechanisms at workplaces in Ethiopia. Among others including Tigist (2003) in Addis Ababa and Tsegaye, (2010). However, the above researches were predominantly relied on the process, role of the elders, as well as the actors in the indigenous conflict resolution mechanism. However, this study is intended to search the issues dealing with causes of conflict and the nature of conflict resolution mechanism at workplace which is not well addressed by the previous researches.

It is with this background of the problem statement, that the study was conducted to address the following research questions:
- What are the major causes of conflict at workplaces?
- What are the types of conflict resolution mechanism used to resolve conflicts at workplaces?
- What is the perception of public officials towards conflict at workplace

Research Methods

A qualitative research approach was preferred to deal with in dealing with the causes of conflict and nature of conflict resolution mechanisms. Qualitative research is exploratory in nature – its methodologies allow for a richer and more in-depth understanding why people think, feel, react and behave about the phenomenon of conflict. It is helpful in building meaningful relationships between the researcher and the target groups; focuses on the interpretation of the perception of people and explores the problems that cause conflict (Creswell, 2012). The study was designed analyze the causes of conflict and nature of conflict resolution in Gondar Town at workplaces in the public sector.

Description of the study area

The study was conducted in Gondar city, which is found in northwestern Ethiopia. Gondar is situated about 731 km north of Addis Ababa. Gondar has a latitude and longitude of 12º 36’ N 37º 28’E with an elevation of 2133 meters above sea level and a population of 358,257 (CSA, 2007). The mean annual temperature is about 19ºC. The modern city of Gondar is popular as a tourist destination for its many picturesque ruins in Fasil Ghebbi (the Royal Enclosure), from which the emperors once reigned. The city holds the remains of several royal castles, including those in Fasil Ghebbi (the Royal Enclosure).

Data sources and collection instruments

In this work, both primary and secondary data sources are collected. Interviews were conducted and appropriate documents were analyzed. The complex causes of conflict and nature of conflict resolution mechanisms were rationally analyzed and explained from different angles.

Primary Sources: The Interviews were conducted to get information which assures comparability of data. The data collection was undertaken with officials and employees at work places using convenience sampling techniques. Open ended questions were used to get insight from respondents about the nature of conflict and conflict resolution mechanism at workplaces. Among others the major data sources of the study include utility companies, Court of the town, Police sector of Gondar town, Capacity building. Open-ended questions were employed to give respondents an opportunity to express their feelings, ideas and perceptions about the topic under discussion without reserve. Accordingly, the researcher planned to undergo 25 interviews. Different kinds of instruments of investigation were designed for the officials. In addition to their convenience criteria’s like their closeness to the issue under investigation, their positions and experience were considered to select respondents.

Secondary Data: Secondary source of data were taken published and unpublished articles, from books, World Bank Journals, annual reports of conflict prevention and resolution office of the town. These secondary sources of data were used prominently and intensively.
Data analysis techniques

Qualitative techniques were used to analyze the data retrieved from both primary and secondary sources. Accordingly, the data were analyzed using explanatory approach. The data retrieved through interview was analyzed through correlating the data with existing literatures.

Results and Discussion

The analysis and discussion part was organized to address the issue of corruption risk factors on government revenue.

Causes of conflict at workplaces

According to the director of conflict prevention and conflict resolution office conflict at workplaces is being posing a negative challenge. The researcher strived to assess the nature and type of workplace conflict at utility companies. In such companies conflict is often occurs and the nature of the conflict is inter-personal. Mostly, the conflicts happen between the management staffs and employees.

According to the office of civil services explicate that “inter-personal conflicts occurring at workplaces in government institutions are negatively affecting the working environment, are creating places for crimes like corruption. Even though the government has tried to make working places as peaceful and legible as possible through Civil Service Reform Program yet the government is not making a follow up to exercise the implementation of this reform”.

The findings of the interview conducted with employees of the High court of the town: “Conflict in the sector is the result of ineffective leadership and incoherency during decision making. Individuals who are politically affiliated and with poor excellence get all the good positions and incomes while those who are not become less beneficial which creates discontent and grievances among them. Such grievances pay off conflicts between individuals which meant in work instability and insecurity in the institutions”.

Jeong (1999) has indicated that an excessive level of frustration is accumulated when a person is blocked in its pursuit of a goal. Dollard (1939) has depicted that violence is induced by frustration associated with certain situations; an external simulation releases inherent tendencies of the frustrated agent to attack.

Moreover, as Gurr (1970) has said value capabilities lead people to believe that they are rightfully entitled to a certain good and conditions of life since these capabilities are goods and conditions that they think are capable of getting and keeping, but an intolerable gap between anticipated realities and the manifest reality of life conditions serves as a precondition for conflict and violence.

Conflict as per members of the capacity building office occur because of different reasons.: “Members of the office get in to a conflict since There is rigid procedures of work in the institution which do not give a place for individual decision making role, sometimes because of individuals misconduct and Competition on work at the institution. But mostly it occurs because of lack of enough resources in the institution”.

According to the High court Officer of the town, the major causes of conflict in the institution are favoritism and bribery as elsewhere in other sectors in the country. According to the officer a non transparent recruitment process in the institutions subsuming recruitment malpractices like favoritism, bribes, and nepotism besides misplacement of skills and resources in the institution have been causing different types of conflicts among individuals.
Besides, poor communication leads to misunderstanding and strife among employees. For instance, misunderstandings can occur if the manager asks one employee to relay important instructions to the other employees, but the employee fails to do so appropriately. Conveying wrong information can lead to projects being incorrectly done and to employees blaming each other for the end result.

As institution strives to achieve their goals, they often met with challenges they must overcome as a team. Challenges leave room for conflict between members, other organizations, communities and other parties involved in the organization’s mission. While “conflict” often has a negative connotation, the effects of conflict within an organization can be positive and negative.

Effects of conflict at work places

Mental Health Concerns

Conflict within an institution can cause members to become frustrated if they feel as if there’s no solution for their problems, or if they feel that their opinions go unrecognized by other members or party in the institution. Their frustration forces them to view others as hostiles. As a result, members become stressed, which adversely affects their professional and personal lives. Members of the institution may have problems sleeping, loss of appetite or overeating, headaches and become unapproachable. In some instances institutional members may avoid meetings to prevent themselves from experiencing stress and stress-related symptoms. As some researches indicate the perception of an enemy is formulated in a way to protect oneself which make them perceive the other party as a ‘container’ of unacceptable psychic content previously built into unconscious mechanisms (Volkan, 1990).

4.13.2. Decrease in Productivity

Conflict causes members to focus less on the project at hand and more on gossiping about conflict or venting about frustrations. As a result, institution can lose money, donors and access to essential resources.

Some researches show that when members of an institution have a varying sense of entitlement in their pursuit of available welfare or status, it is the dissatisfied state of mind rather than tangible supply of goods or status that produce conflict and violence (Davies, 1971).

Employee Turnover

Members of the institution who are increasingly frustrated with the level of conflict within an organization sometimes decide to end their membership. This is especially detrimental when members are a part of the executive board or heads of committees. Once members begin to leave, the institution has to recruit new members and appoint acting board members. In extreme cases, where several members leave or an executive board steps down, organizations risk dissolution.

Improve Future Communication

Conflict can bring employers together and help them learn more about each other. From learning each others’ opinions on topics relevant to the institutions growth to understanding each member’s preferred communication style, conflict within an organization can give members the tools necessary to easily solve conflicts in the future.

Conflict analysts like Burton (1990) stated that the analysis of differences and needs is essential to resolve conflict and the empowerment of the marginalized can help reduce violence since institutional reforms in dealing with root causes of the conflict is inevitable.

4.13.7. Identify New Members
Members of the institution actively participate in each meeting, enjoy serving on multiple committees and have an opinion on each topic the group discusses. There are also members who seemingly contribute little to the group and observe more than talk. Conflict within an institution can inspire typically silent members to step up and demonstrate their leadership skills by offering meaningful solutions to the problem the group is facing. In this respect Anderson (1993) claimed that identity even if to some extent is rooted in the culture and shared meanings of life it is also the outcome of social and institutional interaction.

If the employee has problems outside of the workplace, such as marital or parental issues, he/she may take them to work with him/her. Consequently, if he/she is short and withdrawn from her coworkers, and if they are ignorant about the cause of his/her behavior, they will assume that he/she has an issue with them. Therefore, if he/she is not willing to divulge/disclose his/her problems to coworkers, he/she should leave them at home.

### Conflict resolution mechanism at work place

#### Negotiation

An informal negotiation takes place among conflicting parties in the institution to discuss their concerns in private. This allows for tempers to calm so the people involved can look at the issue more objectively. Some researches indicate that negotiators search for common interest and narrow the gap between the divergent positions. Each sides seeks to attain agreement as close to its own preferred positions as possible but initial positions are compromised for exploring minimally acceptable positions for both parties (Hughes, 1997).

#### Mediation

The interview results indicate that there have been many cases where by an informal mediator like the general manager of the institution involved to resolve conflicts among members of the institution. At this stage, the parties agree they can’t find a solution and someone comes in to mediate. In some cases, the company policy dictates what needs to happen, so the informal mediation is intended to find a way to implement a solution that will allow both parties to walk away knowing the issue is resolved so they can get back to work.

Accordingly, responding positively to proposals from a neutral party helps disputing parties from appearing to yield to the opponent’s pressure (Bercovitch, 1992)

Researchers like Curle (1986) claimed that the informal mediator should attempt to establish or re-establish sufficiently good communication between conflicting parties so that they can talk sensibly to each other without being blinded by such emotions as anger, fear and suspicion.

### Conclusion and Recommendation

The general objective of this paper was to assess the nature of conflict and conflict resolution at the work place. The study found out that that Inter-personal conflicts exist in the institution more often and the existence of conflicting needs is one of the causes of work place conflict.

Besides the findings of the study indicate that workers dissatisfaction, incoherency in decision making at the institution, weak leadership, work place recruitment mal practice (favoritism, bribes, nepotism…) Lack of enough resources in the institution, competition on work at the institution, poor moral conduct and rigid procedures of work in the institution which does not give room for personal moral integrity serves as the root causes of conflict.

The study also finds out that Negotiation and Mediation is one of the commonly used dispute resolution mechanism at workplaces. The informal mediator may be someone internal to the
organization like the general manager more or less hierarchically remote from the parties in dispute depending on the size of the organization and its policy.

The institution should create and organize a conflict prevention and resolution center which can work to reduce and prevent conflict. The institutions should have conflict early warning system. Every government institution should create awareness about the effect of violent conflict on human life, institutional resource and development. Awareness raising Training should organize members of the institutions so that they will have moral integrity and fulfill their professional duties. Besides, every institution should give value for joint effort of both formal and informal conflict resolution mechanisms at work places.

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