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**THE ROLE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTITIONERS IN CONFLICT
RESOLUTION.**

BY

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DEDICATION

I sincerely dedicate this piece of work to Jehovah Yahweh for granting me this honour, sufficient grace, and mercies throughout this study. To my parents and to my boss Mr. Godwin Kouwoadan for their constant support and encouragement.

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ABSTRACT

The study explored the topic, the role of public relations and strategies used in the resolution of conflict within beverage industries and the challenges associated with them.

Qualitative research design was adopted to best discover, gain more insight and understanding about the concept.

A set of interview questions were administered to Human Resource practitioners who oversaw the resolution of conflict within their respective industries. Sample was drawn from three beverage industries by actively engaging (6) participants.

The findings show that mediating, compromise, confrontations, ignoring, collaboration, discernment and fairness and firmness were the effective strategies adopted in conflict resolution in the industries. But the study rather showed the importance placed on confrontation and mediation with others complementing the main ones.

The research concluded that the proper role of PR in the hierarchy of management of beverage companies should be given the necessary recognition for its full contribution to be felt.

The researcher further recommended future researchers to consider looking into factors affecting the perception of the importance of PR in the manufacturing industries.

CHAPTER ONE

1.0 Introduction

Workplace conflict is very real at all levels within an organization, whether private or public, among top, middle hierarchy or between employees. It is unavoidable as long as people from different belief systems, culture, religion, status, lifestyle, and temperament co-habit in one environment. It is worth knowing that conflict free organization can never exist and never will. (Fleetwood & Karen, 1987). This chapter covers the background of the study, the problem statement, and the purpose statement. It also looks at the study objectives and the research questions as well as the significance of the study, scope of the study and the limitations of the study.

1.1 Background of the study

Conflict is found in all aspects of society and organizations are not immune. If it is not surprising for families with blood connections conflicting with one another, then it is very much expected among individuals from different backgrounds and personalities. Conflict in the workplace is as a result of incompatibility that exists when value and interest of individuals clashes (Kazimoto (2013). Hocker and Wilmot (1985, p. 23) define conflict (from a communication perspective) as "an expressed struggle between at least two interdependent parties who perceive incompatible goals, scarce rewards, and interference from the other party in achieving their goals.

Many people perceive conflict differently, some see it to be a root cause of tension, disagreement, hostility, and rivalry among workers. But as a matter of fact, the presence of conflict in an

organization is a necessary evil. Because it creates room for management to come up with workable strategies in dealing with it. On the other hand, conflict adds creativity and innovation to resolving problems instead of the old usual way (Huang, 2001). The effective use of the right mechanism to properly resolve and address conflict not only builds oneness but also improves organizational policies and operations to increase productivity (Batool & Riaz, 2013).

Studies have shown that (Grunig et al., 1998) effective public relations contributes to the reduction of conflict within the work environment and its publics. The process where two or more parties reach a peaceful resolution to a dispute is known as conflict resolution and a skill required in every environment. Good outcomes can never be realized in resolving conflict unless all parties involved are made to recognize its existence and be willing to address it.

Steyn (2009, 2011) argues that practitioners need to act as an early warning system, initiate dialogue between organizations and their publics, and draw management's attention to the publics' perspectives to prevent and solve conflicts. The resolution process can either be formal or informal. Formal channels are outlined by the organization and consider a rational approach to conflict resolution. Informal approach on the other hand considers a channel that has not been specified, and this means the approach is non-rational (Iqbal & Afsheen 2013, p. 125). Most CEOs in organizations today see themselves more credible and authentic to be the image and the voice of the organization, however Ahmad & Idid, (2020) reveals the opposite, despite their authenticity, there is the need for them to be guided by a PR practitioner on the best approach to communicate.

Huang (2009) analyzed how public relations strategies are functionally related to conflict resolution, and Qiu and Cameron (2007) focused on how strategic conflict management as a public relations tool can be effective in health communication in managing and resolving conflict.

However, within the Ghanaian environment, extensive research has targeted more of conflict and crisis management roles of practitioners in solving conflicts within corporate organizations (Anani-Bossman, 2020; Ofosu-Boateng, 2020; Osei-Kyei et al; 2019). Notwithstanding, less attention has been given to the role of PR in resolving conflict within the beverage manufacturing industrial sector in Ghana. More so, the strategies adopted by the practitioners in resolving conflicts, the challenges faced and the effects of the adopted strategies are unknown within the beverage manufacturing sector in Ghana. Therefore, this study will seek to fill the gap by identifying the roles of public relations practitioners in conflict resolution.

1.2 Statement of the problem

As espoused by Gardiner and Simmons (1992) and Acharya, Dai Lee, & Man Im, (2006), Conflict arises when there are differences in two or more beliefs, interests, and perceptions. When conflicts are not well resolved it creates an uncomfortable feeling and unnecessary tension within the organization. Organizational conflict is a state of discord caused by the actual or perceived opposition of needs, values and interests between people working together.

Conflict takes many forms in organizations (Psychologist Art Bell, (2002) conflicting needs, conflicting styles, conflicting perceptions, conflicting goals, conflicting pressures, and conflicting roles. Therefore, the role of PR practitioners is very essential in devising every strategy in resolving

this conflict. (Grunig et al., 1998) Studies have documented that effective public relations help reduce conflict within and outside organizations but over the years, there have been many scholarly literatures and write ups on the PR practice in the developed world (Cameron et al, 2008; Gallicano, 2013; Holtzhausen & Roberts, 2009; Huang, 2009; Murphy, 1991; Plowman, 2005a; Plowman et al., 2004., Ertem-Eray, E. J. Ki, (2020), moreover, through review it has been established that most are tailored to focus more on conflict management and practitioner's roles instead of resolving them (Ahamefula, O. P. (2014).

However, in the developing countries especially Nigeria and Kenya (Akinola, A. O., & Uzodike, U. O. (2018), Ambunya, L.O. (2020), Oluwagbemisola, O. O., ODUOLA, S. O., & Babarinde, L. B (2018)., Nnebedum, O. F. (2014) very little information is published when it comes to the practice. Also, not much research has been done to find out how these conflicts were resolved by the practitioners. The Ghanaian context on the other hand also reveals little information published online regarding the concept (Antwi Coffie, R. N., Tinda Balestraus, E. R. N. S. T., & Sarkodie, R. (2013)., Charles N. A., Ayiku & Isaac Tandoh (2020), Oppong Adjeiet al (2013). Therefore, the present study serves as an attempt to enrich the existing literature on PR role in conflict resolution from PR practitioners 'perspective.

1.3 Study Objective (s)

1.3.1 General Objective

The general objective of the study is to find out the role of PR practitioner's in resolving conflicts in beverage manufacturing industries in Ghana.

1.3.2 Specific Objectives:

The study will specifically seek to;

- I.** Find out the role of public relation practitioners in resolving conflicts within Beverage manufacturing companies.
- II.** Investigate the strategies used by public relation practitioners in resolving conflicts in beverage manufacturing industries.
- III.** Identify the challenges faced by public relation practitioners in resolving conflicts in beverage manufacturing industries.

1.4 Research Questions

- I.** What are the roles of public relation practitioners in resolving conflict within beverage manufacturing companies?
- II.** What conflict resolution strategies do PR practitioners adopt when dealing with conflict?
- III.** What are the challenges faced by PR Practitioners in the implementation of conflict resolution strategies?

1.5 Significance of the Study

The study will offer the opportunity to contribute to existing knowledge, improve upon research experience and provide a basis for further research. It will also be beneficial to PR practitioners and units on the strategies adopted by PR practitioners in resolving conflict, find out the extent

practitioners involved in conflict resolution and finally, discover the challenges faced by them in the implementation process.

1.6 Justification

Arguably, conflicts are inevitable in every human society but effective public relations are an essential ingredient in managing any such crisis or conflicts in the world (Valackiene, (2010)). This is so because any form of conflict involving human and effective resolution tends to benefit the organization in its development agenda. In a situation where tensions are high and crises could escalate, effective public relations would be a prerequisite in calming tensions and controlling the situation. Manufacturing companies like beverage companies in Ghana work with humans both within and external and so conflicts are inevitable. While some beverage companies are into the production of alcoholic and others non-alcoholic, arguably the kind of workers and customers alike will be different and so the nature of conflicts may equally differ. Same way, the conflict resolution strategies may differ as well, however, in Ghana no research has been conducted to know and appreciate the strategies used, the effectiveness of the strategies and understand the challenges confronted in using the strategies adopted in resolving conflicts in organizations with similar but different in nature of beverages produced. This study will therefore add to existing knowledge on the role of public relation practitioners in resolving in such organizations and promoting growth and development.

1.7 Scope of Study

The parameters of this study strictly restricted to the beverage manufacturing industries in Ghana. More specifically, the study is narrowed to two beverage manufacturing industries located in Greater Accra with one purely noted for producing alcoholic and the other non-alcoholic beverages. The focus will be on the public relation unit at the headquarters of the institutions due to their supervisory role played in managing conflicts in their organization.

1.8 Organization of the Study

The study will be organized in five separate chapters with chapter one covering the study background, problem statement, study objectives, research questions, justification of study, scope of the study, organization, limitation, and conclusion of chapter. This will be followed by chapter two which will focus the review of relevant literature based on the major concepts being considered in the study. Afterward, the chapter three will be devoted to discussing the research method thus; the research design, sampling approaches adopted, study population, data collection tools and analysis technique to be used. The Chapter four will attempt to present and discuss the findings of the study and fuse it to existing literature to confirm and validate or otherwise of the results. Finally, the summary of study findings, conclusion and recommendations of the study will be chronicled in Chapter five to complete the study.

1.9 Limitations of the Study

Undeniably, the study will face some challenges in data collection considering the official protocols that will be required for researchers to reach out to the sampled organizations. This has the tendency to delay the data collection stage of the study. Likewise, getting quality research

materials in the era of proliferated research information online makes it challenging. Nevertheless, the beauty of academic research is to overcome the identified obstacles to achieve the aims of the study and so a plan will be relayed to overcome these anticipated limitations.

1.10 Operational definitions

Conflicts are largely complex in nature and the complexity of the concept is noticeable in the lack of a common definition.

David (1972) defined the concept as a disagreement between two or more individuals or groups, with each individual or group trying to gain acceptance of its view or objectives over others. On the other hand, according to the Webster Mariam dictionary, conflict is a fight, battle, war in an armed conflict.

Similarly, Marcus (2006) describes conflict as the incompatibility of ideas, beliefs, behaviors, roles, needs, desires, and values. Alam (2021) most recently also defines conflict as a disagreement between two or more channel participants on an issue. Nonetheless, for the purpose of this study, “Conflict is defined as the incompatibility of ideas, beliefs, values, needs, behaviors and roles between workers from different departments within the same organization.”

Resolution is the action of solving a problem, dispute, or contentious matter

Conflict resolution is the process by which two or more parties reach a peaceful resolution to a dispute according to the Harvard law School.

Public relations do not only disseminate information but also facilitates mutual understanding and resolves conflict between organizations and their publics Grunig and Grunig (1992).

Public relation conflict resolution strategies are the different processes and tactics employed by PR practitioners in facilitating a peaceful ending of conflict.

1.11 Conclusion of Chapter

This chapter is relevant to the study because it sets the tone and predicts the direction of the research. It has introduced and presented a study background to explain the genesis of the topic. It further establishes the problem statement to defend the need for the study, the objectives, and research questions, justification of study, scope of the study, organization of the study, limitation, and conclusion.

1.12 Summary

In this chapter, the researcher has stated the topic to be researched and the rationale behind it.

Following that are the research problems, objectives, and questions to be administered for findings which are clearly outlined. More so, the study equally has more dimensions with operational definitions of concepts that have been spelt out with justifications and study limitations. The essence of the study in conflict resolution in organizations is to expand knowledge, and serve as the basis for future research.

This research is targeting specifically the beverage sector to fine tune strategies to deal with potential conflicts when they arise because the nature of an organization also affects the types of conflicts that can emerge therein.

CHAPTER TWO LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter is directed at reviewing relevant literature on the concepts as identified in the topic and objectives understudied. The chapter will begin by reviewing existing literature on conflict, its definitions and causes in organizations. The concept of Public Relation here in refer to as (PR), its meanings and forms will be discussed. Subsequently, the role and strategies of PR practitioners in conflict resolution will be perused respectively. Finally, under this chapter, the theoretical underpinnings which will be used to develop the conceptual framework will be discussed also before a conclusion for the chapter will be drawn.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

2.1.1 Conflict Theory

Conflict will continue to be inescapable and unavoidable within societies and organizations so long as humans are persuaded in working together in a never-ending competition for finite resources. The conflict theory was postulated in the 18th century by German philosopher and sociologist Karl Marx (1818–1883) and was regarded as the father of social conflict theory. The conflict perspective views society as a dynamic entity always undergoing change driven by class conflict. Where functionalism perceives society as a complex system striving for balance.

The Conflict theory outlined the inequalities that arise between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. These disparities are clearly seen in the distribution of resources among the two groups within society where the powerful in the society turn to hoard wealth and leave the powerless die poor.

Marx's theory did not outline whether conflicts are good or evil, however it explains the reasons why things are the way they are during the 19th century thus the era of capitalism (Holmes et al, 2007) the bourgeoisies had all the power as all the industries were controlled by them whereas the proletariats become the laborers within the factories producing all the needed goods and services and amassing wealth for these minorities. This is what was termed as the ruling capitalist class and working class (Walters & Crook, 1995) of which one class furthers its interest over the other.

The sociologist further advances his argument that inequalities fuels changes in society leading to the poor which are exploited to become aware and form a class consciousness resulting in the overthrow of the capitalist model and the formation of a socialist model. Many social theorists have built on discoveries of Marx's conflict theory to strengthen it, grow it, and refine it over the years. Explaining the reasons why Marx's theory of revolution did not manifest in his lifetime, Italian scholar and activist Antonio Gramsci argued that the power of ideology was stronger than Marx had realized and that more work needed to be done to overcome cultural hegemony, or rule through common sense.

In addition, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, critical theorist who were part of The Frankfurt School focused their search on the rise of mass culture mass produced art, music, and media contributed to the maintenance of cultural hegemony. More recently, C. Wright Mills drew on conflict theory to describe the rise of a tiny 'power elite composed of military, economic and political figure who have ruled America from the mid-twentieth century.

This theory is thus considered fit for this study because conflict is said to be unavoidable in organization but could be resolved to bring positive impact if the root causes are identified and

right strategies are put in place. Therefore, knowing what triggers conflict and discovering the roles played by practitioners will help to effectively curb its effects. In the same vein, as mooted by Grunig and Hunt (1984) in their asymmetrical model, thus two-way communication aids to foster good working relations within an organization.

Besides, in multinational cooperation like beverage producing companies that employ hundreds of people and have different departments that coordinate to work in an organized system to serve the public, conflicts are inevitable. Resources for production are naturally always scarce and insufficient and require management. As conflict arises between the higher hierarchy and the lower hierarchy which Karl Max refers to as the bourgeoisie and the proletariat respectively, the conflict theory better outlines a procedure in resolving it to achieve positivity. This study therefore seeks to adopt this theory to establish how companies in this study resolve organizational conflicts with the help of the PR practitioners.

2.2 Definitions of Conflict

The world is a complex society engulfed with various degrees of conflicts. Arguably, conflicts are ubiquitous and inevitably part of the existing society with varying antagonistic effects. If organizations continue to encourage working in teams, conflict cannot be evaded since it is an inevitable aspect of teamwork. Conflict is an essential part of human life and is an outcome of behaviors because occasionally, whenever there is an interaction there is conflict. The complexity of the concept is also embedded in the lack of a common definition.

According to Thakore (2013), conflict is an expression of hostility, negative attitudes, antagonism, aggression, rivalry, and misunderstanding; it is also associated with situations that involve contradictory interest between two opposing groups.

Similarly, Larfela (1988) opines that the concept ‘conflict is in opposition with one another, thus disagreement between people or members of organizations is described as conflict. Part of the competition process that is basic to the survival and successful evolution of the species, homoseres and to his search for new and better ways to cope with limited resources and stress from environmental change are perceived conflicts in itself.

Per this definition, conflict only exists when people or members of an organization interact in one way or another. Nevertheless, organizational conflict is postulated as the behavior meant to obstruct the success of some other person’s goals. Conflict is thus the product of incompatibility of goals which arises from opposing behaviors in the same organization.

According to Lewis, French and Steane (1997), conflict within an organization is inevitable. This is a consequence of boundaries arising within any organizational structure and creating separate groups that need to compete for scarce resources.

Nevertheless, Cross (1979) asserted that conflict as differences between and among individuals in relation to values, goals, motives, resources, and ideas. Hocker & Wilmont (1985), further contended that conflict is an expressed struggle between at least two interdependent parties who perceive incompatible goals, scarce reward, and interference from the other party in achieving their

goal. The difference in establishing a single definition for the concept conflict is an expression of conflict among conflict researchers.

Leung (2010) also argued and concluded that conflict can affect everyone to a varying extent especially at the workplace where people work together on a daily basis within organized systems of resources. Where the resources are opened to all departments, conflicts are inevitable. Conflicts as an inevitable part of the society are consequently positive or negative depending on the on nature public relations strategies that will be adopted in managing a conflict in an organization.

2.3 Definition of Public Relations

Public relation is a comprehensive and marginal application science which theoretically covers different subjects (Yuanzhong, 2005). Some of these subjects include, communication, psychology, and knowledge of current affairs, media relations, language skills, and ethics. An excellent PR practitioner combines several parts of the above disciplines in order to bridge the communication gap between the organization and its public. Many scholars have advocated their thoughts and opinions about the concept and came out with definitions of it.

Cutlip, Center & Broom (1999, p6) define public relations in the following way: it is the management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the public on whom success or failure depends.

According to Ledingham & Bruning, (1998) public relations is referred to as “relationship management” this implies that the focus of public relations is the management of an organization’s

relationship with the public through a four-step management process of analysis, planning, implementation, and evaluation.

The field of public relations can also be described as “the management function that identifies, establishes, and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the various publics on whom its success or failure depends” (Cutlip et al., 2006).

The public relations society of America (PRSA) defines it as a strategic communication process that builds a mutually beneficial relationship between organizations and their publics (PRSA, 2020). Similarly, Harlow (1976), defines public relations practice as “the distinctive management function which helps establish and maintain mutual lines of communications, understanding, acceptance and cooperation between an organization and its publics’.

Nonetheless, Grunig, Grunig, and Dozier, D. M. (2002). Referred to it as a communication practice that places emphasis on building a two-way symmetrical and positive relationship between organizations and their stakeholders. Therefore, public relations can be said to be a discipline or profession whose aim is to build a workable relationship with organizations and its publics by maintaining that goodwill which is relevant to the organization. Invariably, Public Relations involve a variety of activities (counselling, internal communication, media relations etc.) which are conducted to promote the reputation and image of an organization’s products and policies in the eyes of the public.

Interestingly, PR in Ghana is slightly different from PR practice in other parts of the world in terms of elements like culture, traditions, value system etc. In modern terms, the practice is employed in

different disciplines such as economics, politics, sports, tourism, security, and many surfaces of human life due to the benefits associated with it. Because the nature of conflict is complex, it needs skilled, trained, and capable practitioners to come up with creative ways of managing the situation.

It is important not to see them as agents of peace and not ‘fire fighters’ when it comes to managing and resolving conflict.

2.4 Public relations role

Public Relation is used to build rapport with employees, customers, investors, voters, or the general public. Almost any organization that indulges itself in being portrayed in the public environment employs some level of public relations.

Public relation is not limited to simply increasing awareness about an organization. It deals with other complex functions of checking and monitoring the reactions of its actions (Ahluwalia et al 2000). This illustrates what the organization reflects to its market hence aiding in deciding the next course of action as and when required.

PR plays an important role in organizations because they represent a broader group of activities, especially everything surrounding communication activities of an organization (Lee, 2011). It mirrors the views and the philosophy of the organization and its publics. It equally serves as a channel of establishing reciprocal goodwill for better relationships. Public Relation plays an important role in organizations because they represent a broader group of activities, especially everything surrounding communication activities of an organization (Lee, 2011). It mirrors the

views and the philosophy of the organization and its publics. It equally serves as a channel of establishing reciprocal goodwill for better relationships.

A PR practitioner's role covers a wide range of job scopes and this includes crisis management. Broom and Sha (2013) define crisis management as 'the PR specialty that helps organizations strategically respond to negative situations and to negotiate with stakeholders affected by perceived and actual consequences of crisis. It is of importance for PR Practitioners to up their games by developing themselves especially if they want to be part of the decision makers or dominant coalition. Most at times they are undermined because they do not prove themselves enough to be needed.

Empirical studies affirm that management expectations and perceived value of Public Relation serve as a factor that determine their involvement in strategic management (see Moss, Warnaby & Newman, 2000; Saidhatul, Nizah, Mat, Tazin & Kaur, 2017). Nonetheless, deducing from the excellence theory, PR must be part of strategic management to be effective thus their participation in decision making (Grunig, 2008). As a strategic management function, the role of PR is to counsel management on issues that affect the reputation of organisations and their publics. Wilcox, Cameron and Reber (2017) asserts that the only way PR can prove their value to top management is by effectively resolving conflict.

Despite the advent of all the modern technologies aimed at fostering healthy relations within the workplace, it has become even more challenging to resolve it. Workplace conflict clearly outlines the discord that occurs when goals, interests or values of different individuals or groups are

incompatible and frustrate each other's attempt to achieve objectives in an organization because it creates the chance for reconciliation and corrections (Kazimoto, Osad and Osas, 2013).

Conflict has now become one of the innovative and creative means to solving problems since it facilitates experimentation of different strategies to address a single problem (Rahim, 2010; Tang et al., 2017). Public Relation is known to play one paramount role of creating a conflict free environment within an organization by encouraging feedbacks from all groups.

According to studies, public relations among many have proven to be effective in resolving conflict between an organization and its publics (Grunig et al., 1998). The concept has been defined differently from academics to practitioners.

2.5 PR Strategies for Conflicts

There have been several empirical studies conducted by conflict resolution and public relation researchers in resolving conflicts in organizations and large societies across the globe. In so far as the phenomenon of conflict is inevitable, likewise peace and development in organizations within societies, conflict resolution is eminent. In an attempt to resolve conflicts in organizations, researchers argue that public relations are a vital ingredient. As the saying goes “prevention is better than cure”, meaning, it is always prudent for PR practitioners to prevent conflict by identifying the root causes and perpetrators of conflicts.

However, when conflict occurs, there are strategies that should be used to resolve it. Nevertheless, there are different PR strategies that are used by practitioners depending on the situation at hand. For instance, the conflict resolution strategies that may be adopted by a PR practitioner in a

multinational beverage producing company will not be the same that will be used in small scale private firms or public institutions.

Ertem-Eray, and Jung Ki (2020) in their study titled 'roles and functions of public relations practitioners in the resolution of conflicts in the U.S. and Turkey. A comparative study was made while comparing the negotiation techniques used by public relations practitioners in conflict resolution in the contexts of the two countries. Literature was reviewed from written documents; Purposive technique was used in selecting respondents and asking open ended questions by using a semi structured interview technique. Also, a pilot test was conducted to obtain meaningful responses through a survey instrument and adjustment made for the questionnaire.

Findings indicated that both U.S. and Turkish public relations practitioners manage conflicts strategically and see their duties as acting as an early warning system, explaining to top management the impacts of their interventions in conflict resolution, and even advising management on societal values.

Practitioners from both countries also pointed out that they perform their mediator functions in resolving conflicts through establishing a dialogue between their organizations and publics, playing an active role, and consulting top management. These findings confirm Plowman's (2005a) conceptualization of public relations and conflict resolution that incorporates strategic management, mediation, and judgment ability for both countries. Furthermore, the study suggested that practitioners should know the folk culture as well as the organizational culture of the countries they work in and collaborate with local practitioners to resolve conflicts effectively. By doing so

it is crucial they perform their environmental scanning role to understand the publics of different countries where their organizations are located.

Additionally, it was outlined that the roles of public relations practitioners are effective in resolving conflicts between their organization and the publics of both countries. If public relations practitioners fulfill their managerial and reflective/strategist roles in their organizations, they act as an early warning system to top management before issues emerge, initiate dialogue with pressure groups, and explain stakeholders' views to top management. These findings are consistent with Steyn's (2009) conceptualization of roles.

In the same vein (Ahmad & Idid, 2020) in their pursuit to identify PR practitioners' roles in crisis management from the Malaysian perspectives. Their study utilized a nationwide survey on over 300 PR practitioners across the country. This study attempted to explore how PR practitioners perceived their role in crisis management. This study argues that their perception would reflect their actual action in managing crises. The study discovered that the majority (85%) of practitioners believed that crisis management was under the purview of PR. At the same time, they also attributed the highest responsibility of managing the crisis to the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) (88%). The study also found other departments, particularly the legal office (68%) and the security office (61%) had a moderate role in managing the crisis.

However, the marketing office's involvement in PR practitioners' roles in crisis management was low. The acknowledgement that crisis management is under the purview of PR is significant because it makes it explicit that once a crisis occurs, then the PR manager will know that it is his/her duty to take charge. It is also clear that the manager will have to get the CEO as well as

other relevant officers (legal, security) to be involved. The crisis management custodians need to ensure that there is no misunderstanding among officers in managing the crisis.

The study revealed that, despite the CEO being the most credible and authoritative voice and mostly wanting to be the spokesperson, they must further be guided by PR on the best approach to communicate with the media and other stakeholders. Presenting the right contents that meet stakeholders' expectations is equally important as having the right person to represent the organisation during a crisis. The involvement of multiple actors in managing crises supports similar studies that assert excellent PR is not only involved in strategic decision processes but must also work with other management functions to build relationships with relevant stakeholders (Grunig, 2008).

The study concludes that to study crises, one must study the PR practitioners first, knowing the extent to which they are sensitive and alert to the demands of managing crises. At the same time, PR practitioners should acknowledge their strengths and weaknesses, and continue to improve their capability in spearheading crisis management.

According to Armstrong (2009) Conflict may have either a positive or a negative effect on organizational performance. Unmanaged conflicts for instance have a negative effect since they disrupt the organization and prevent optimal performance (Beardwell and Claydon, 2007). Negotiation therefore plays a key role especially for managers who are charged with the responsibility of conflict management arising from antagonizing parties (Okumbe, 2001) Negotiation to get a win- win outcome can help those in charge to fix the situation, promote an increase in productivity and aid in the ability to foresee future issues. (Armstrong, 2009). If conflict

isn't handled effectively, it may cause further damage and lead the team or organization down a vicious path of poor performance (Erogluer, 2011).

Arnold (1983) in his writing outlined four main conflict resolution strategies namely; avoidance, diffusion, containment, and confrontation. According to Arnold (1983), avoidance strategy is the first step in conflict resolution and it is believed that conflict should be prevented from occurring thus simply ignoring the conflict or imposing a solution. This strategy may be adopted in minor cases in which quick action is needed to prevent the conflict from occurring or escalating. Even so, there is no small or big conflict. The insignificant forms of conflict that many people turn to ignore, many times intensifies into unsolvable ones.

Arnold referred to the second strategy of conflict resolution as Diffusion. According to the author, in diffusion strategy, an attempt is made to deactivate the conflict and cool off the sentiments and aggressions of the groups involved.

Further, under the third strategy of containment in conflict resolution, some conflicts are allowed to surface, but it is carefully controlled by discussing how they can be resolved by using a structured procedure and further making way for representatives of the conflicting parties to negotiate and bargain toward resolving the conflict. For Arnold (1983), the last strategy proposed is Confrontation which argues that both parties are allowed to confront each other in an attempt to settle the dissatisfaction amicably.

Debatably, (Kerf et al., 1998; UNDP, 2017; World Bank Group, 2018) also outlined the major types of conflict resolution mechanisms for PPP which include negotiation, mediation, arbitration,

and litigation. However, the nature of the conflict, relationship between parties involved and its sensitivity will determine the strategy to adopt. Negotiation is said to be where both parties participate in direct discussion to resolve the conflicting issue (Chan and Suen, 2005; UNDP, 2017). This is normally the initial step in resolving conflict and it is usually preferred because it offers the opportunity for a peaceful resolution to the conflict (UNDP, 2017). As a matter of fact, negotiation is mostly preferred because it is comparatively beneficial including deepening bonding between parties and less expensive because it does not engage in any formal process. However, the drawback is that the final negotiation decision or agreement is not legally binding meaning a party can decide to comply or not to.

On the other hand, mediation involves the engagement of a mediator to work towards both parties coming to an agreement. For example, the PR practitioner acts as mediator when they intervene in resolving internal conflicts. Similarly, arbitration is a method whereby a neutral third party, usually called an arbitrator, is appointed to decide, or award after the parties involved in the conflict have argued their cases out (UNDP, 2017). In arbitration, parties do not engage in mutually agreed solutions but present their cases and wait for the judgement of the arbitrator. Unlike the other forms, arbitration is legally binding and must be complied by all parties involved (Marques, 2018). The final strategy is Litigation, which is the way of resolving conflict among parties using the court system (Chan & Suen, 2005). This stage is mostly not used because it is time consuming and aside that the court may also lack necessary knowledge and expertise in resolving conflict with certain issue in question (Kerf et al., 1998).

These stages are all essential to PR practitioners because the practitioner is expected to employ a specific strategy handling crisis or any form of conflicts. In all instances, the PR practitioners are always required to be on top of what is happening in order to be able to resolve the conflicts arising.

In doing so, building good relationships such as a two-way symmetrical approach with the aim of creating, maintaining, and protecting the organization's reputation, enhance its prestige, and present a satisfactory image. Also, it is good to note that some degree of conflict can never be altogether evaded or avoided but treated as a necessary part of running an organization. In all these there are existing theories that have been proposed by conflict resolution researchers as the best alternatives to be adopted and one of such theories is the Conflict Theory propounded by Karl Marx (1818–1883).

2.6 Related Studies

Longe, (2015) explored the impact of workplace conflict management on organizational performance in a Nigerian manufacturing firm. 250 employee participants were selected using stratified random sampling technique. The results of the study offered strong empirical support for the existence of a positive and statistically significant effect of conflict management on organizational performance.

In the same vein, Oluwagbemisola, and ODUOLA (2018) in their research on public relations strategies in managing conflict and its effect in University of Lagos found that dialogue, collective bargaining, effective communication, and confrontation are Strategies used by Public Relations practitioners in conflict management. Also, Public Relations experts within the University are

given the chance to take part in decision-making while management is faithful to the bargain of public relations. The study concluded that Public Relations Strategies such as collective bargaining and effective communication are effective in managing conflict.

Similarly, Boom, and Dansoh, (2021) in their topic conflict management strategies by stakeholders on construction projects in Ghana. The study discovered factors such as lack of communication, failure of clients to honour payments and contracts awarded to incapable contractors as the main cause of conflict in the construction industry. The study concluded that compromising, accommodating, and competing conflict management styles should be adopted when conflicts erupt on road projects to resolve them.

Relatedly, in the public secondary schools in Machakos county in Kenya, Iravo, (2012) identified a clear relationship between conflict management and performance of school organizations. The researcher asserts that when managements are knowledgeable in conflict management and at the same time putting this knowledge into practice, schools will experience less conflict as compared to current happenings. In furtherance, he recommended that conflict management systems should be integrated within the system of the organization and the integration should be at a higher level of the organization hierarchy rather than mere interconnection.

Abdulraheem, Mohammed and Salau, (2020) also examined conflict management style and employee performance in selected organizations of Northern region of Ghana. Finding reveals that the avoidance style mostly leads to avoidant decisions in organizations and the avoidance style leads to avoidance of radical innovation which is also bad for organizations hence, the avoidance style was seen as not good for decision making and innovation in organizations. The study

therefore recommended that employees should imbibe the spirit of sacrifice and selflessness as a means of ensuring that conflicts are nipped at the early phase before they escalate.

2.7 Conclusion

From the aforementioned discussions, it is obvious that public relations promote good relationships and creates mutual understanding between the organization and its many stakeholders. The chapter did not report on any original work but made use of available sources to further understand what has been studied regarding the topic of interest. The chapter highlights the meaning of conflict, the concept of PR, strategies in conflict resolution, role of PR practitioner, theoretical framework, and empirical review. However, the chapter on review is continuously unabated until the final completion and submission of this study and so relevant literature will be added when the need arises.

2.8 Summary

The chapter under review shows that Public Relations bridges the gap between management of organizations and their internal and external publics.

The researcher reviewed related literature on the research topics including the theory which underpins the various methods for effective resolution of conflicts in organizations. It has clearly been shown that conflicts are inevitable and equally have positive connotations and if identified early can be turned to the benefit of the organization.

In addition, the literature review considered the different definitions of conflict, meaning of Public Relations roles and strategies, including related studies to identify gaps in previous studies on this topic for additional suggestions, proposals, and recommendation as future tools to resolve conflict.

CHAPTER THREE (3)

STUDY AREA & METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

The chapter was devoted to outline the research methodology or design adopted to help in achieving the objectives set for this study. Research methodology is basically the systematic processes a researcher adopts in showing how their data was generated. In sequential order of presentation, the chapter will proceed by discussing research design, explaining the target population, sample size, sampling method, data collection methods/instrument, techniques for data analysis, validity and reliability of the study, ethical considerations as well as procedures for data collection.

3.1 Research design

Research design is a tactical framework for action that serves as a bridge between research questions and the execution and implementation of the research strategy (Durrheim, 2004). The quality of any research findings is determined by the choice of an appropriate methodology or design that fits the purpose (Weber, 2004). According to Christensen (1988) “research design refers to the outline, plan, or strategy specifying the procedure to be used in seeking an answer to the research question. It specifies such things as how to collect and analyze the data” (p.219).

Qualitative research is more subjective and uses methods such as reviewing documents, the use of open-ended question/in-depth interview, ethnography, observation and focus group discussions in contrast quantitative is more objective and therefore uses more of structured interviews, questionnaire, and survey. This study adopted exploratory research in enquiring from practitioners

their insight on the topic of study. (Grinnell, 2001:241), Researchers must be creative, open minded and flexible while adopting an investigative view in exploring all sources of information. It was further added that creative questions should be posed and advantage should be taken by chance which might influence or change the situation, which might have wider implications.

Similarly, Patton, (2002), asserts that the most common sources of qualitative data include interviews, observations, and documents. It was further revealed that the main purpose of qualitative data analysis is to uncover emerging themes, patterns, concepts, insights, and understandings. Hence in this study, the researcher adopted a qualitative research method. Qualitative research method was developed in the social sciences to enable researchers to study social and cultural phenomena: observe feelings, thoughts, behaviours, and the belief of the mass society Babu, (2008). Creswell (2014), Denzin and Lincoln (1994), Merriam, (2009), indicates qualitative research as the right approach for exploring, interpretation and understanding meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social phenomenon or problem. Further, Shank (2002) (as cited in Ospina, 2004) defines it as “a form of systematic empirical inquiry into meaning”. By systematic he means “planned, ordered and public”, following rules agreed upon by members of the qualitative research community. By empirical, he means that this type of inquiry is grounded in the world of experience. Inquiry into meaning says researchers try to understand how others make sense of their experience. Interviews was employed and specifically a semi-structured as a tool in communicating with respondents in their respective organizations. Semi-structured interview is a method of research that is most used in the social sciences and in qualitative studies it provides depth in analysis of data Hitchcock & Hughes, (1995), Bernard (1988).

3.2 Population

A research population is usually a collection of persons or objects that is the focus of a scientific query. Polit & Hungler, (1993) defined a research population as the totality of a well-defined collection of individuals or objects that have common, binding characteristics or traits. Burns and Grove (1993), added that a population is defined as all elements (individuals, objects, and events) that meet the sample criteria for inclusion in a study.

The study population targeted public relations and any staff within the organization endowed with the knowledge in conflict resolution. Three (3) Public Relations practitioners in addition to 3 persons one from each organization endowed with information about conflict and the role of PR practitioners. Smaller sample size was selected in this study because of its intention of garnering an in-depth understanding of the concept under study which centered on the how and why factor (Charmaz, 1990, p. 1162). The study engaged in a one on one with participants within the Covid restrictions therefore it would have been challenging if it focused on larger size. Also, findings of the study were not generalized and neither did it relied on hypothesis testing.

In addition, any accessible person endowed with information about the Public Relations Unit/department was however engaged. Cooper & Schindler, (2006); Parahoo, (2014), also defined the population as the total number of units (individuals, organizations, events, objects, or items) from which samples are selected for measurement. Additionally, Saunders et al. (2012), also point out that a population is the full set of cases from which a sample is taken.

3.3 Sampling Method

A sample means a subsection of individuals from a larger population. Sampling is the selection of a subset of the population of interest in a research, Turner, (2020). Sampling is the process of selecting a smaller group of participants to tell essentially what a larger population might tell if every member of the larger population the same questions. The different sampling techniques can be subdivided into two groups: namely probability sampling and non-probability sampling. Probability sampling starts with a complete sampling frame of all suitable individuals from which samples are selected, Adwok, J. (2015)

This means that all eligible persons have a chance of being chosen for the sample, and by this means results can be generalized from the study. Examples include, Simple random sampling, systematic sampling, stratified sampling, and cluster sampling. This method tends to be more time consuming and expensive than non-probability sampling. On the contrary, in a non-probability sampling, not every individual has the chance to be included in the study. This sampling techniques is often used during exploratory and qualitative research. Nevertheless, non-probability sampling methods tend to be cheaper and more convenient than the counterpart. Snowball sampling, convenient sampling and purposive sampling are the examples. Therefore, this study adopted a purposive sampling and snowball sampling in selecting the PR department and practitioner within organization. Snowball sampling is a method that relies on referrals from initially sampled participants to other persons who are believed to have interest in the study. Venette (2013) defined it as when an individual respondent recommends possible participants for a study.

3.4 Sample Size

A sample size is defined as the number of observations used for determining the estimations of a given population. The size of a sample are drawn from a population. The sample sizes in qualitative research should not be too small that it is difficult to achieve saturation. At the same time, the sample should not be too large that it is difficult to make deep, case-oriented analysis (Sandelowski, 1995). Creswell (2002) recommended that qualitative researchers should, (a) study one cultural-sharing group in ethnography, (b) examine three to five cases in a case study, (c) Interview 15-20 people during a grounded theory study (d) explore the narrative stories of one individual in narrative research. Narrowing down, Morse (1994) suggests that qualitative researchers use at least six (6) participants in investigations where the goal is to understand the essence of experience. The research further recommended in the case of ethnographies 30-50 respondents are to be engaged.

The study interviewed a sample size of three (3) Public Relations Practitioners from three different beverage industries and three (3) accessible staff within their units. In total 6 participants were engaged from the beverage industries.

3.5 Data collection Method

Accurate and systematic data collection is critical in conducting scientific research. Data collection allows researchers to collect relevant information about their study objects. Depending on research type, methods of data collection include: Questionnaires, Interviews, Laboratory experiment, observation, measuring, or a combination of different methods etc. This study proposes interviews as a method for data collection.

3.5.1 Interviews

The study administered interview guide which was designed in line with the study objectives to have a one-on-one contact with respondents. This technique allowed respondents to freely express themselves and answer questions flexibly. According to Silverman (1997: 98), interviews are active interactions between two or more people leading to a negotiated contextually based result. These interactions can come in a structured, unstructured, and semi-structured form to generate insights and concepts.

Moreover, with the permission of the interviewees a sound recorder was used. Additionally the responses and findings were transcribed, analyzed, and themed based on the most repeated issues.

3.6 Data Analysis Technique

Miles & Huberman, (1984), the emphasis in qualitative analysis is “sense making” or understanding a phenomenon, rather than predicting or explaining. A creative and investigative mindset is needed for qualitative analysis, based on an ethically enlightened and participant-incontext attitude, and a set of analytic strategies. They also explain that the distinctive features of qualitative data collection methods are also reflected in the methods used to analyze those data.

Qualitative data rather focuses on text than on numbers. The “text” that qualitative researchers analyze is most often transcripts of interviews or notes from participant observation sessions, but text can also refer to pictures or other images that the researcher examines Miles & Huberman, (1994).

Thematic analysis was adopted by this study. Thematic analysis is an appropriate method of analysis for seeking to understand experiences, thoughts, or behaviors across a data set. Themes are actively constructed patterns (or meanings) derived from a data set that answer a research question, as opposed to mere summaries or categorizations of codes, (Braun and Clarke 2006).

3.7 Ethical Considerations

The cornerstone of ethical research is 'informed consent' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The term consists of two important elements, with each requiring careful consideration, that is, 'informed' and 'consent.' They further added that participants must be fully informed of what will be asked of them, how the data will be used, and what (if any) consequences there could be. The participants must provide explicit, active, signed consent to taking part with the research, including understanding their rights to access to their information and the right to withdraw at any point.

Ethical considerations are essential elements in every scientific research so to ensure credible data collection devoid of confusion from respondents within the study areas, a formal permission was sought from the participants engaged. The study objectives was communicated to the persons for willingness before interviews conducted. Likewise, to ensure confidentiality, protection and minimize risk, names or other identified information was not collected from persons interviewed

3.8 Validity and Reliability of the Study

Validity in research is concerned with the accuracy and truthfulness of scientific findings

(Le Comple & Goetz 1982: 32). A valid study should demonstrate what exists and a valid instrument or measure should measure what it is supposed to measure. There are many types of

validity and many names have been used to define the different types of validity. Campbell & Stanley (1966) have defined two major forms of validity that encompass the many types. They refer to “internal” and “external” validity, terms which are today used in most nursing research textbooks.

Denzin (1970) used the distinction between internal and external validity and applied it to qualitative research. Internal validity is the term used to refer to the extent to which research findings are a true reflection or representation of reality rather than being the effects of extraneous variables. External validity addresses the degree or extent to which such representations or reflections of reality are legitimately applicable across groups. Reliability is concerned with the consistency, stability, and repeatability of the informant’s accounts as well as the investigators’ ability to collect and record information accurately (Selltiz et al 1976:182). It refers to the ability of a research method to yield consistently the same results over repeated testing periods. In other words, it requires that a researcher using the same or comparable methods obtain the same or comparable results every time he uses the methods on the same or comparable subjects. It further requires that the researcher has developed consistent responses or habits.

3.9. Summary

In this chapter, research design, data collection method, sample size, data analysis technique, ethical considerations and validity and reliability of the study were subjected to strict scrutiny and the vital roles they play in the study.

This study adopted a qualitative research design in order to extract in depth explanations from respondents through the usage of semi-structured interviews. In furtherance of this approach, three

main Public Relations practitioners will be sampled in addition to three other officers within the unit or department with requisite knowledge about strategic conflict resolution methods.

Finally, data will be analysed and classified through different themes for deeper appreciation of real organizational experiences when it comes to conflicts and how they were handled or managed.

The researcher will place high premium and utmost priority on ethical considerations and confidentiality so that respondents can feel shielded and the research findings will be solidly reliable.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS OF FINDINGS

4.0 Introduction

This section is concerned with the analysis, interpretation and discussion of the data and facts obtained from the study field. The analysis is limited to the three objectives which were to find out the role, strategies and challenges faced by PR practitioners in the resolution of conflicts within their organizations.

4.1 Background

The findings were drawn from practitioners in charge of conflict resolutions from the beverage industry and a total sample size of six (6) respondents, comprising of three (3) departmental heads in charge of resolving conflict internally and externally, in addition to three (3) other individuals with the required knowledge and who can equally assist in the same cause. The researcher initially went with the aim to interview PR practitioners who undertake the task of handling conflict and communication issues, nevertheless, the research discovered that this role that was originally taught in class as the main duty of PR unit has been usurped by another department.

Remarkably, all the industries visited did not have a PR practitioner neither was there any separate unit or department that deals with conflict, however the Human Resource (HR) department was

found to be multi-tasking this role in addition to their many tasks. Hence the HR practitioners were rather interviewed based on this additional role they are in charge of.

4.2 Data Analysis Methods

After the face to face interviews with the respondents, recorded information's from the interview sessions saved on tapes and notes taken were transcribed. These findings were further coded with specific themes in relation to the research questions.

4.3 PR's Role in Conflicts Resolution

The responses from the participants indicate that a lot of employees from time to time have serious disagreements leading to conflict because of their background and sometimes the desire to outperform their colleagues in the company. This discovery through research agrees with Hocker & Wilmont (1985) and Larfela's (1988) conceptualizations that, conflict arises in the form of disagreement, rivalry, and goals incompatibility between two or more parties. In addition to these root causes of conflict which were indicated by respondent's conflict equally occur by reason of background differences, infringement or breach of companies' policies and regulations by internal stakeholders. Conflicts are often common in manufacturing industries where beverages are produced whereas they are minimized in importation, distribution, and resale industries.

“Conflicts are mostly experienced within a manufacturing industry because we do not produce the drinks ourselves, we seldom encounter conflict because we have few employees. Most at times the few we experience are from the sales persons who sometimes clash among themselves. One participant in charge of marketing stated.

According to her, their employees know what their jobs entail therefore they do not have the luxury to engage in unnecessary arguments. It was further mentioned that because of the nature of their organizations they go for employees who are conscious of their responsibilities and duties because the organization does not tolerate any form of laziness or slackness.

Unanimously, all the participants did not see conflict resolution within the workplace as the role of public relations practitioners. Therefore, conflict resolution as a concept was confidently understood to fall under the purview of human resource department (HR). They also explained that other managerial staff who also get involved with the responsibility of resolving conflict issues apart from the HR are the CEOs and the General Managers. Hence taking the findings into account, Public Relations role of representing a broader group of activities especially everything encompassing communication, relationship building and strategic management process as explained by scholars (see Cutlip et al., 2006; Grunig, 2001; Lee, 2011) was in nowhere confirmed.

Participants reaffirmed that conflict resolution falls directly under their unit in the sense that whenever conflict occurs, they are the first to be recommended for intervention. It was made crystal clear that, they do not see the essence of having a PR department whiles there already exists a human resource department who equally were trained with the capacity to resolve conflicts. One of the participants, stressed that conflict resolution is a sole responsibility of their department because during their training they underwent a course in how to handle workplace grievances and conflict and therefore it was suggested that external conflict especially with those outside the organization be assigned to the PR professionals if the need arises.

The participants reiterated that when they are confronted with conflict, the main steps they take are to actively listen to the parties, understand what triggered the issues and as well try to minimize its negative impact on the organization. This is to create a balanced ground to tackle and deal with the issue impartially. When the question on the possibility of their organization employing a PR practitioner was asked during the interviews, it attracted the following response:

One participant stated, “I feel it will not be necessary, why because we as Human Resource Managers are well capable due to our previous training to handle workplace conflict therefore having to bring in an extra hand in the person of PR will be like paying two staff to execute the same task.”

A staff with multiple functions as finance officer, personal assistance to the general manager and a management staff, mentioned she will suggest that at their next management meeting. She expressed her frustration because she is being overburdened with extra responsibility which are meant for her boss including the role of handling conflict issues which is more demanding and very stressful.

Another participant who has been working close to 12 years and multi-tasking as both the HR, communication person and assisting the marketing department said, she will love to be assisted but as to when that will take effect is the question.

“I am part of management and nothing as such has ever been discussed all these years I joined. She further said, “My work is so much engaging that I have to sometimes even work on weekends and holidays just to clear some of the pending tasks on my desk.” Therefore, having a PR practitioner who will (professionally) take care of some task under his/her direct job description will be a relief and accelerate the completion of assignment on time.

4.4 PR's Strategies in Conflict Resolution

Interacting with practitioners from beverage industries in charge of issues concerning conflict defined strategies as diverse ways and processes used to addressing issues concerning conflict. Findings revealed that within the beverage industries, most used strategies are mediating, compromising, ignoring, confrontation, discernment and being fair and firm. It was stressed that depending on the magnitude of the conflict, they decide how urgent the issue is to be addressed and further choose whether to deal with it immediately or postpone the intervention. If it is postponed, the matter is not touched at all for number of days with the intention of discovering some untold truth that will aid the resolution process.

This strategy is very efficient most at times because whiles the issue is left unresolved or unattended to on time it gives them more room to unearth the remote causes and other undercurrents. Furthermore, apart from ignoring strategy, her superior adopts discretion most at times in resolving conflict within the organization. When an issue is reported especially when it is sensed that something is concealed, her responses are often short, for instance, "I have heard you both, go back to your post you will hear from me soon." Nonetheless, someday somehow, the whole truth finally emerges to confirm party's individual versions and the main causes dealt with for peaceful cohabitation.

Similarly, two of the respondents confirmed to be implementing the strategy of fair and firm of the quasi-legal process. They argued that even an accused 'person' needs to feel confident in the process. Therefore, being fair and firm means to assume a judicial approach which complies with

the requirements of natural justice where the offender is given an opportunity to be heard for impartiality's sake. In trying to be fair and firm in the resolution of conflict, it is expedient to constantly communicate and remind employees of what is expected from them and what is not. The same participant revealed that based on the context of issue or magnitude, the HR department decided whether to involve other department in dealing with conflicts. "We collaborate with other departments and management in resolving conflict but sometime depending on the context of the issue we solve it alone." revealed by one participant. Another fact discovered was that, not all employees follow the laid down channel of grievances reporting. The standard approach is normally to first convey through the immediate supervisor and if it fails to be resolved they will go further to HR department, management and finally the labour office if all efforts fail.

The confrontation strategy was also confirmed to be adopted by participants as one key tool for conflict resolution. This is where issues are brought into public hearing where opposing parties are allowed to present their positions or cases in the presence of a mediator in an attempt to reaching a mutual satisfactory solution. This strategy is mostly engaged when the parties are to work on a project together but due to disagreement could not cooperate together to get the work done.

Additionally, the participant that said they do not often experience conflict in their organization explained that, their best adopted strategy in minimizing conflict within their establishment is having to commit employees to the signing of bond to be of good behavior before employment. These serves as a deterrent to employees because they are aware of the consequences of workplace conflicts, they then turn to compromise and accommodate one another to prevent the HR's involvement which leads the sacking of the guilty party.

“Conflict issues rarely comes to my desk because they know when it does, one of them will surely be the cause of the conflict and must be laid off because the company’s policy frowns on that behaviour, therefore, before I try to intervene, they already settled it among themselves for good”.

The participants confirmed that they are not given any additional professional training or capacity building skill in handling conflict within their organization. They however consented that it will be very helpful they are trained on how to adequately and efficiently understand and handle conflict since human behaviours is dynamic and needs careful and constant updated knowledge in handling it.

4.5 Challenges with Conflicts Resolution

The process of bringing calmness into a conflicting environment can be very burdensome on the practitioner and triggers strong emotions before this becomes a reality. Practitioners responsible for resolving conflict expressed some difficulties and common obstacles that are usually present along the process.

With unified responds from the respondents, they all consented on the challenge of being overwhelmed with the magnitude of workload. “Aside a lot of responsibilities to be achieved with deadlines, as if that is not enough, I am also expected to listen to employees’ conflict and try to bring sanity and calmness into situation.” It was noted further that conflicts do not happen in a vacuum therefore with little information of what may have triggered the conflict puts more pressure on the mediator to do whatever within their power to address the issue with insufficient background information or undercurrent.

More so, the challenge of being labelled as bias and inconsiderate. Dealing with conflicts in the workplace poses silent threats to the mediators without the realisation of the belligerent parties. The likelihood of being accused of favouring one employee at the detriment of the other is very high, and most often the neutrality is overshadowed by the suspicion. One participant gave a scenario of an issue he resolved between a departmental head and his subordinate who happens to be the practitioner's best friend which in return became a big deal. "It's so challenging because no matter how you try to be objective, they still feel you are supporting someone because of the relationship that exists between two of you. After discovering that the fault was from the department head, he made a whole lot of unguarded statements which questioned the integrity and impartiality of my office. This makes it very difficult to stand in the same position to mediate with fairness which doesn't attract ungrounded accusations."

Another obstacle is having to deal with difficult people who are not prepared for any form of peaceful resolution. The worse of all is those with the 'I've been here for a long-time syndrome'. These individuals no matter what you say or do will not have a change of mind. Some even go to the extent of discouraging other employees from reporting issues to you.

Adequacy of time is another challenge that was revealed, they said, getting to the bottom of issues and trying to resolve them thoroughly is very difficult and needs a length of time. It is true that conflict cannot be eliminated from human society but rather minimized with appropriate steps and measures taken. However, these processes and steps turn to consume much time. One particular participant said, "You use your whole week trying to resolve one conflict between employees who

have made up their mind to part ways. You will say whatever that needs to be said but it will be as if you are pouring water on stone, they will keep wining and nagging about the same thing”.

In furtherance, a participant from a family business explained that interference of families and relatives within the resolution process is another big challenge. When addressing conflict issues between a relative and an employee who is not a family member, sometimes you are expected to compromise by bending principles to favour the relative, but if the opposite happens when the process does not go their way you are branded and tagged wrongly.

On the contrary, aside all the above challenges outlined, one manager insisted that they do not encounter any challenge in the resolution of conflict because everyone within their organization is aware of the implication when the policies are breached.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Introduction

The final chapter deal with the summary of the findings in relation to the research questions. It will further conclude and as well serve as a basis for the researcher to make certain recommendations with suggestion for further studies.

5.1 Summary

Throughout the study it was confirmed that HR managers were those in charge of the resolution of conflict and any related communication issues within their organizations. They were strongly confident that when it comes to conflict resolutions, it falls under their purview. It was also revealed that depending on the issue or the magnitude of conflict, they decide whether to engage another department in resolving it.

In addition, it was evident per the findings that; HR department also has the capacity to resolve work related conflict because part of their professional training also equip them to handle workplace related grievances and conflicts. From the finding, part of the roles played by managers when confronted with conflict situations take the form of actively listening to the parties, understand what triggered the issues and as well try to minimize its negative impact on the organization.

Equally the findings revealed that within beverage industries, conflicts are often witnessed within the manufacturing and production sector where the beverages are produced, however within distribution and retail industries they seldom experience internal conflict. It was further explained that the many conflicts are generated due to the multiplicity of units or departments associated with manufacturing having a lot of employees handling production, labeling, and packaging and other specialized duties before the final product is released into the market.

Some of the participants felt it was necessary to have PR practitioner to relieve them of having to handle conflict and related communications issues while others felt it wasn't necessary because they also receive training to resolve conflict therefore bringing them will be like paying two people in doing the same job. The commonly used strategies in resolving conflict within the beverage industries are mediation, compromise, confrontations, ignoring, collaboration, discernment and fairness and firmness. It was noted that depending on the magnitude of the conflict, HR manager decides whether the issue deserves immediate attention or should be postponed to another time. Apart from the HR managers recognized to oversee conflict resolution, greater priority is also given to the CEO and some relatives when it comes to the resolution of conflict between employees.

Similarly, two of the respondents confirmed to be implementing the strategy of fair and firm of the quasi-legal process. They argued that even an accused 'person' needs to feel confident in the process. Therefore, being fair and firm means to assume a judicial approach which complies with the requirements of natural justice where the offender is given an opportunity to be heard for

impartiality's sake. The outcomes as well noted that in the case of being fair and firm in resolving conflict, it is expedient to constantly communicate and remind employees on what is expected from them and what is not. They revealed that before anything is reported, it must first be channeled through the immediate supervisor and if it fails to be resolved they will go further to HR department, management and finally the labour office if all efforts fail.

Additionally, one famous strategy used by one organization is having to commit the employees to signing of bonds before they are employed. Because of this strategy employees turn to resolve every interpersonal issue themselves because they know going reporting the one in charge will lead to the termination of their contract when they are found in violation of any company policy.

The findings also revealed some common challenges confronting practitioner during their duties. With unified responds most respondents agree that they are most at times faced with the challenge of been overwhelmed with the magnitude of cases to be resolved. Conflict is a whole concept on its own and inevitable therefore having to add that role to a practitioner's job description becomes overload of work. Adequacy of time was also listed to be one major challenge. Bringing two parties together to resolve a conflict can be very time consuming and especially when it involves difficult employees who do not want the issue solved.

Finally, interference of families and relatives within the resolution process is another challenge. When addressing conflict issues between a relative and an employee who is not a family member can be very problematic. A practitioner is influenced to pass judgement in favour of the family

member and if he/she goes otherwise they stand the chance of being suspected of being bias, treated unfairly and sometimes even putting their job on the line.

This study cannot be said to be without limitations. The participants were limited to the beverage industries who were as well sampled for a larger population therefore, this study cannot be generalized to public relations from other industries.

5.2 Conclusion

The role of Public Relations in conflict resolution and taking their full position in organizations as communication officers cannot be over emphasized. From the results of the research carried out, it is obvious that Public Relations contributions, expertise, and skills are heavily needed when it comes to conflict resolution and reputation building though some human resource managers are in denial of this fact.

The study also concluded that most effective strategies in resolving conflict within the beverage industry are confrontation and mediation whilst the remaining do in one or the other complement the main ones.

Conflict in its nature is not bad but when not handled with the right strategy and attention needed can even lead to prolonged challenges. Beverage industries must visualize the positive aspects of conflict and work towards it so that instead of instilling fear in employees not to disagree they could rather look at putting workable strategies and practitioners that will concentrate their efforts to helping maintain good relationship within and outside the workforce.

The researcher based on the discoveries of this study slightly disagrees with conflict theory that only attribute sources of conflict to the inequalities between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The current study turns to side more with the Psychologist Art Bell, (2002) who revealed and ascribed the various forms of conflict within organization to conflicting needs, conflicting styles, conflicting perceptions, conflicting goals, conflicting pressures, and conflicting roles. The current study observed that many people within the industries have their individual perceptions and styles when it comes to executing a task therefore, having to take instruction from the other person perhaps who may be younger or new, results into conflict and misunderstandings.

5.3 Recommendation

Public relations have often been linked only to image and reputation building between an organization and its external public overlooking the internal publics. Nevertheless, if the internal public needs, complains and grievances are not equally met it will in the long run ruin that reputation the practitioner is trying to build with the external forces. The other thing that needs to be made clear is that public relations role and duties in helping to build a two-way symmetrical relationship with publics cannot be sidelined and substituted by any other profession.

The recommendation will be drawn from the statement of problem and overview problems faced by public relation practitioners. The following recommendations when well implemented by beverage industries will bring solutions to conflicts that are inevitably present or that will crop up during the existence of the company.

Managements must create and employ the services of a Public Relations practitioner within their various organization to fully concentrate and manage communication related issues. It is obvious that being their main function they will go an extra mile to engage employees in a proactive manner to identify potentially boiling issues way ahead of time before they explode into conflict.

It is also recommended that employees be encouraged to give early warning signals or report to practitioners for preventive measures to be put in place to minimize the consequences or damages as a result of prolonged conflicts.

Experts in charge should be given the free hand and the autonomy in the process of resolving conflict because interference of managements and other relatives have a way of communicating the ineffectiveness or saying practitioner are not efficient in their field. In the same vein, practitioners must be objective in handling conflict issues because their inability to be fair, will go a long way to damage and break relationships.

PR professional bodies should sensitize owners of companies and potential and entrepreneurs about the importance of the PR component within their establishments. It can be deduced from the findings obtained through the interviews conducted within these three organizations that the PR profession and their respective roles are not openly recognized and appreciated.

Finally, it can be equally suggested that a team be put in place by the PR units to monitor and evaluating the effectiveness of strategies used in resolving conflicts situations between parties to avoid post conflict disagreement. Human behavior is not static but dynamic therefore, practitioners

in charge of settling disputes should be constantly updating their knowledge on new approaches to resolving the ever-evolving issues. Ultimately, employees must be brought on board based on the expertise and merit with adequate qualifications and this will promote respect and minimize misunderstandings.

5.4 Limitations and suggestions for further studies

This study has some limitations. First, the participants were limited to public relations practitioners working within beverage industries. Therefore, the findings of the study cannot be generalized to public relations practitioners working in other types of organizations. Secondly, all the three organizations visited did not have any PR practitioners neither their department. Therefore, it became a challenge of finding participants who are willing to partake in the study. Further, some of participants based on their background as assistants to their managers were not certain of the confidentiality promised in the consent form hence, some details were withheld from the researcher.

Future research should consider conducting the same research in other beverage industries to add depth to these findings by gathering insights into practitioner's role and strategies and experiences in resolving conflicts. Further, researches should look into the reasons for the nonexistence of public relations practitioners in certain organizations.

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APPENDIX I

Interview Guide

Introduction

Dear respondent, I am a student of Ghana Institute of Journalism conducting a research study as a requirement for the award of Master's Degree in Public Relations. The purpose of the study is to find out the role of Public Relations in conflict resolution in the beverage industry. I will be very thankful if you could help me conduct the interview to obtain the needed information for the study. I guarantee the information given will be treated with utmost confidentiality because the data to be collected is solely for academic purposes.

ROLE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION

1. Generally, how will you define conflict within the organizational set up?
2. Has there been any conflict situation within this organization?
3. What will say to be the causes of conflict?
4. how will you describe your role in the resolution of conflict in your organisation?
5. Do you solve conflict alone as a department or in partnership with another department?

STRATEGIES OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION

1. What strategies do you use in resolving conflict amicably?
2. Do you undergo any form of capacity building in handling conflict?
3. Are there any preventive measures to minimize conflict?
4. Have your strategies been efficient and effective in resolving conflict other these years?
5. What are some of the challenges you go through in managing conflict?
6. What advice can you give to PR practitioners regarding conflict management in their organizations?

7. What communication channel do you adopt?

CHALLENGES OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION

1. What are some of the challenges you encounter in your department in resolving conflict?
2. Do you only handle internal conflicts or external conflicts as well?
3. Do you have a post conflict mechanism in place?
4. Do you receive the necessary support from management in the process?
5. Is there anything else you would like to add or discuss?

Thank you.