NEGOTIATION AS A CONFLICT MANAGEMENT TOOL AND EMPLOYEES' COMMITMENT AMONG HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS IN KOGI STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The primary responsibility of health care workers is to collectively see to the well-being of the patients, although there have been increased agitations by other medical professionals contesting this practice in recent time. This situation has led to interdisciplinary conflicts among the health care professionals. This study seeks to examine the impact of negotiation on employees' commitment among healthcare professionals. Data was collected through structured interviews of eight executives purposively selected from labour unions within the establishment. Thematic analysis was carried out using Nvivo 12 software and four sub themes emerged: team spirit, job security, salary relativity and headship. The study found that all the themes have a positive relationship with employees' commitment. Thus, well-structured conflict management strategies will lead to increased employees' commitment. Managers must have the ability to understand negotiation skills and to deploy appropriate negotiation styles to extract the commitment of workers towards increased performance. The study therefore recommends that the government should take the issue of signed agreements during negotiation very seriously in order to extract the commitment of employees, while management of healthcare institutions should get themselves acquainted with the dynamics involved in negotiation.

Keyword: Conflict management, Negotiation, Employees' commitment, Job security, Welfare packages and Headship

Introduction

Healthcare institutions in Nigeria are made up of people from different backgrounds, different perceptions about life, different expectations and emotions. These set of people are brought together to ensure that the statutory mandates of these institutions delivering quality healthcare services to patients are attained. In order to achieve these objectives, employees have to work together in different capacities from various departments and units. They would have to share ideas, experiences and perceptions about issues confronting them in the process of

carrying out their responsibilities. Ming-HueiJian (2007) was of the opinion that employees commitment is the art in which an employee identifies with his workplace and his level of interest in achieving the goals of the organisation. Employee commitment is that instinct which makes an employee to go beyond his boundary at ensuring that the organisation succeeds.

Negotiation is a problematic issue in the Nigeria health sector as it has perpetually become part of the "anthem" being used or sung by both the labour and the government when issues of disagreements come to the fore. For example, the 2009 and 2014 negotiated and re- negotiated agreements between the Federal Government and Academic Staff Union of Universities on one hand, and the other hand, between Joint Health Sector Union (JOHESU) and the Federal Government, activities in public healthcare institutions were usually paralysed due to strike actions by JOHESU members due to what they called the unwillingness of the government to implement the agreement they jointly signed in 2014 and other sundry issues such as non-increment in their salaries as against the unilateral salary increment being enjoyed by Doctors since 2014.

Conflicts connote disagreement, quarrels, and disapproval. It is a situation where two or more parties are at loggerheads; not agreeing on a particular or range of situations or things.Disputes between policy makers and workers which are premised on how resources should be allocated, how task will be distributed also brew conflicts (Oseremen & Osemeke, 2015). Under these circumstances, the goal of one individual or group cannot be reached without the cooperation of the other individual or group. As organisations experience more turbulence and uncertainty, conflict in the workplace is inevitable because of limited resources which people are bound to scramble over in its allocation.(Adomi & Anie,2005).

Meanwhile, with the permanent nature of conflict in work-relations, high performance organisations constantly develop the appropriate methods of managing conflict to achieve set-standards and goals. It has been established that the Nigerian organisations have for a long time been concerned with the effect of conflict management on organisational performance in the country (Obasan, 2011). In addition, the Nigeria environment has witnessed various industrial conflicts which are usually labour related arising from disagreements on poor infrastructure and welfare; hence the Nigerian health sector is not left out of its own industrial related conflicts (Omisore, Adesoji & Abioye-Kuteyi, 2017).

One the most common strategies of resolving conflicts is negotiation and it is

successful when the interests of all the parties involved are taken into consideration (Shalley, 2004). Negotiation is a process by which compromise or agreement is reached while avoiding argument and dispute. (Verma, 1999). Since the essence of negotiation involves the ability to move beyond existing ideas and create alternatives, negotiation outcome helps organisations perform well in the area of planning for the achievement of its objectives. (LeBaron, 2003).

Given the above rationale, this study seeks to scrutinise the influence of negotiation as a conflict management tool on employees' commitment in the health sector as the non-implementation of signed agreements between unions and government has led to several industrial disputes thus making negotiation appears an exercise in futility. It is on record that several negotiations have taken place between labour unions and the government on issues in the health sector, but most of these signed agreements were not implemented by the government, thus creating lots of problems which are affecting employees' commitment. Hence, this study seeks to establish the extent to which negotiation impact employees' commitment in the tertiary healthcare institutions in Kogi State, Nigeria.

Literature Review

The role that negotiation plays in resolving disputes which is extracting the commitment of employees has made many researchers to further probe into the topic of conflict management dynamics and service delivery in public health institutions. Therefore, there are many studies in literature which examine the issue in discussion that are reviewed so as to have a historical perspective of it and a balance understanding of the concepts.

Conceptual Review

Organisational Conflict

According to Barki and Hartwick (2004), conflict is viewed as process with so much unpredictability that occurs between mutually dependent parties as they pass through negative thoughts to supposed disparities which might affect the accomplishment of their goals. Also, Jehn and Bendersky (2003) defined conflict as perceived non-alignment of ideas on issues causing negative discrepancies among the parties involved. It can negatively affect organisational performance and lead to loss of valuable personnel. In addition, Ajala and Oghenekohwo (2002) describe workplace conflict as a dispute that occurs when interests, goals or values of

different individuals or groups are incompatible with each other in organisations. On this premise, workplace conflict within the context of employment relationship can be regarded as an inevitable clash of interests and resulting disputes of varying intensity between and within any or all of the active actors in organisations.

Conflict is indeed an expression of disapproval, contradiction and clashes of interest between two groups or parties (Adomi & Anie, 2005).Its occurrence affects the system and its interdependent relationships existing in the system. It brings about disorderliness and break down of rules and procedural orders. Conflict is generic essentially because in every system; social, political and economic issues often generates into conflict. The peculiarities of organisational conflict, always brews out of differences in stakeholder's interests.

Conflict occurs in organisations based on various reasons and causes, however, Henry (2009) maintains that conflicts within an individual usually arise when a person is uncertain about the task expected to be done. Furthermore, management must clearly define roles in order to avert more conflicts. Obi (2012) defined organisational conflict as an act of discontentment and contention which either the workers or employers of labour utilize to put excessive pressure against each other so as to get their demands.

Negotiation

Negotiation is a mechanism used by parties to settle differences, and it is a process by which compromise or agreement is reached for the benefits of parties involved. In any disagreement, individuals strive to get the best possible positive outcomes by holding on to a position or ground that will be beneficial to the party they represent (Redmond, Jameson, & Binder, 2016). However, the principles of fairness and equity are the basis of mutually embarking on negotiation looking for positive outcomes for all parties involved in conflict. General negotiation skills can be acquired through several activities; while acquisition of requisite negotiation skills can be crucial in resolving any differences that may arise between parties. For organisations to achieve desirable outcome, it may be useful to follow a structured approach to negotiation. For instance, in certain situations, there may be the need for a meeting to be arranged in which all parties involved can come together to trash out grey areas. Several scholars (Glenn & Kuttner 2013; Redmond, Jameson & Binder 2016; Kessler, Bruursema, Rodopman & Spector, 2013; Dirks & Parks, 2003) have identified the process of negotiation to include the following stages:

Preparation Stage

Prior to any negotiation, a decision needs to be taken as to the time, venue and parties that would be invited to attend such meeting. While there must be time-line within which disagreements are resolved in order to avoid delay, this stage involves all the pertinent facts and positions that are brought to the table in order to get a clear picture of issues by all parties. The analogy above would allow us to know the 'rules' of engagement in such negotiation. Organisation may well have policies document on conflict resolution which you can refer to during negotiation. This will help in avoiding further escalation of the conflict and dissipation of energy and time during talks.

Discussion Stage

At this stage, warring parties put to the fore their areas of disagreements and the way they perceive the situation. Major skills involved at this stage include questioning, listening and clarifying. It is important to write down observations and vital points during the discussion in case there is need for further clarification. It is crucial to listen, as making mistakes at this stage could be unforgivable and suicidal.

Clarifying Goals Stage

From the discussion, opinions, interests and viewpoints from both sides of the divide are harmonised for clarity. Through this clarification and harmonisation it will be a lot easier to identify common position that is mutually beneficial to both parties. Without clarification in the negotiation process, dark spots are likely to remain which could prevent positive outcome.

Negotiation towards a win-win outcome Stage

This stage focuses on what is termed a win-win outcome where various tendencies of conflict are resolved for mutual benefits and both sides feel their views have been accommodated. A win-win outcome is usually the best result. Although this may not always be achieved through negotiation, it should be the vocal point of all negotiation. Compromises are often positive alternative to holding to the original positions by parties to conflicts.

Agreement Stage

Agreement can be achieved once both sides to conflicts concede part of their viewpoint and reach a common position. It is necessary for parties involved to be open in order to reach a positive outcome without sentiment. There should not be any form of ambiguity and agreement needs to be perfectly clear.

Implementing a course of action Stage

Based on the agreement from the first five stages, resolutions reached should be implemented. However, if both parties in conflict fail to agree despite series of negotiation, then a re-scheduling of meeting has to be taken in order for parties to refresh and re-examine their positions. At this point, negotiators will look at alternative solutions for some level of compromises to be reached.

Employees' Commitment

Employees' commitment is the psychological attachment and the resulting loyalty of an employee to an organisation. When employees are committed to their organisation, they align themselves to the goals and aspirations of the organisation. This is when the connection between employees and organisation is so broad and deep.

Employees' commitment can be viewed from a perception point of view having different meaning to people depending on their level of understanding. That nevertheless, it is one of the most studied behavioural performance indicators in management science. Employees' commitment has to do with the level of obligation, bound and loyalty an employee has for the organisation. It is that which makes an employee to give the best to ensure that the organisation performs well. Ming-HueiJian (2007) opines that employees' commitment is an employee's identification with the organisation and his psychological support to its mission. It is an employee's bound with the organisation aligning his ambition with the organisation's vision and mission.(Chau-Chiuan Yu, 2005). It is employee's sacrifice to make organisation achieve its mandate and inclining to the needs and societal preferences (Balay, 2000). A committed employee is the one who stays with the organisation in good and bad times, promptly attending to work by putting in his best at all times, looking after organisation's values and property for attainment of its goals (Meyer & Allen cited in Chen & Jiang, 2009). Akintayo (2010) posits that employee's commitment is the extent to which the employee commits to the ideals of the organisation.

Organisations extract commitment from employees through the following factors which include; respecting employee needs, provision of career development opportunities, promoting team spirit and bonding, as well as creating sound strategies which will engage workers constructively and so on. However, there are at least three types of commitment which include; affection for your job or the love and passion you have for what you are doing, the obligation to stay on your job by way of feeling obliged to be committed to your organisation as well as your task, while the third type of satisfaction is the fear of loss; not wanting to lose your job. This makes employees to put in extra efforts to their jobs because the feeling of insecurity on their jobs.

Theoretical Review

Traditional Theory of Conflict management

Traditional View (1930-1940) says that conflict must be avoided as it reflects malefaction within the group. Conflict is viewed as a destructive tendency negatively related to bad outcomes. Conflict can be effectively managed by top level management because of their strategic vision and understanding of issues. This school of thought hinges its proposition on the need to avoid conflict because of its negative tendencies. Thus, there is need to pay attention to causative factors of conflict and put forward corrective measures for increased service delivery (Robins, 2005). Most conflicts have negative connotations, invoke negative feelings and often lead to destruction. Whether the effect of conflict is good or bad depends on the strategies used to deal with it (Rahim, 1986)
In addition, this theory critically examined various perspectives about a subject matter or issue from a wider and sociological point of view. It was postulated by Karl Marx and Max Weber, which focuses on conflict as inevitable part of the social life, while the societies are enmeshed by inequalities and thus there is an emphasis on the role of competition in producing conflict.

In addition, the theory believes that, conflict is not necessarily a negative aspect of society, since it produces social change. The society comprises of both dominant and subordinate groups which compete for resources- the- have and the- have not. While it is no longer considered effective to avoid workplace conflict, it is however necessary in order to calm emotions before the commencement of conflict resolution. Conclusively, this theory states that a minimum level of conflict is of good value to the organisation and the staff because it propel creative thinking, innovativeness, and healthy competition among health professionals which will result in improved service delivery to patients and nip conflict in the bud.

Empirical Review

In the work of Oleribe, Udofia, Oladipo, Ishola and Taylor-Robbinson (2018) where the documented physicians' views on healthcare workers initiated strike action in Nigeria were examined. The methodology of their study was cross-sectional and descriptive approach using a self-administered pre-tested structured questionnaire. The study concluded that poor staff welfare, salary, leadership and government inability to implement agreements were common causes of healthcare workers' strikes.

Goff (2018) conducted a study on intra-professional conflict among registered nurses in hospital nursing: A phenomenological study of horizontal violence and bullying. The objective of the study was to explore the lived experiences of registered nurses who experienced horizontal violence and bullying. The study adopted qualitative technique using transcendental phenomenology approach. Data was collected through informal conversations with each participant using open-ended structured interview Purposive sampling approach was used to identify six registered nurses who worked in hospitals and left their jobs due to conflict related to horizontal violence and bullying. The study revealed that all participants described feelings of isolation and frustration due to a lack of support from their fellow registered nurses and administration, including nurse managers, supervisors and hospital administrators.

In another study conducted by Omisore, Adesoji, and Abioye-Kuteyi (2017) on inter-professional rivalry in Nigeria's health sector which compared doctors and other health workers' views at a medium health facility. The objective of the study was to examine inter-professional rivalry (IPR) between doctors and other health workers and their understanding of its effects. The study used a descriptive cross-sectional method involving 120 health workers. It concluded that IPR has surpassed peoples' expectation in Nigeria. However, its negative impact has not been duly recognized, especially by non-doctors. It recommended that there was an urgent need for education of health workers on the area of specifying the roles, functions, and ethical responsibilities of the various healthcare professionals so that needless confrontations would be avoided.

Baird, Tung and Yu (2017) carried out a research work on the impact of organisational commitment on performance in hospitals. The objective of the study was to introduce and examine a new theoretical model on employees' commitment and hospital performance. The study adopted survey method study for data

analysis where it found that with the provision of support facilities and human resources positively indirectly associated with both patient care and operational effectiveness. It recommended that managers should try to enhance the provision of adequate facilities in order to elicit staff commitment and enhance hospital performance, and they should also provide adequate personnel, including appropriate numbers of beds, nurses, and doctors, to prevent tiredness and provide adequate support facilities.

In a study conducted by Ojo and Abolade (2014) who explored the impact of conflict management on employees' performance in state owned institutions in Nigeria which focused on the impact of conflict management on employees' performance. The study adopted the survey research design method for its analysis. A total of 100 respondents were selected for the study using stratified sampling. Questionnaires were used to collect data, while data was analysed using descriptive statistics. Hypotheses were tested through regression analysis and correlation coefficients. The study found that effective conflict management enhanced employees' performance in organisations. The study therefore recommended that organisation should embark on training and retraining of its employees in area of conflict management so as to create a conducive working environment for the employees and there should be efficient and effective communication within the organisation

In another study carried out by Akintayo (2010) which examined the effects of employee commitment on organisational performance in Coca-Cola Nigeria. The study sought to examine the influence of employees' commitment on organisational performance and employees' turnover. Descriptive and explanatory methodologies were used. The study concluded that there was fairly high relationship between employees' commitment and organisational performance.

Methodology

The study location was Federal Medical Centre, Lokoja, Kogi State, North Central Nigeria and employed qualitative approach using structured interviews to elicit information from selected health care professionals which includes doctors, pharmacists, medical laboratory scientists, technicians and others at the Federal Medical Centre, Lokoja.

The population of study comprised of 1,029 members of staff in the selected medical and health professionals of the Federal Medical Centre Lokoja, and eight staff whose job description fitted the focus of the study were interviewed, while

recordings were transcribed and thematic analysis carried out using Nvivo 12 software where four themes emerged.

Data Presentation and Discussion of Findings

This section deals with the presentations of data and the results obtained from interviews conducted. It also deals with demographic data of respondents.
Findings on the work status of the respondents which shows eight (8) respondents, out of which six are males representing 75%, while the number of females is two which represents 25%.There are two medical doctors and six other professionals within those interviewed at the Federal Medical Centre, Lokoja.

Demographic Analysis of Respondents

Demographic features of respondents were considered with the aim of identifying relevant stakeholders and subsequently select them for interviews, and thereby fell into four (4) categories as; gender, experience, level of education, status in the union.

Table 1:   Respondents' Background Information

S/N	Informants/codes	Organisation	Experience	Date of Interview
1	Inf. JHS1	F.M.C LOKOJA	Top-Union Executive	2nd May,2018
2	Inf. NMA1	F.M.C LOKOJA	Top-Union Executive	2nd May, 2018
3	Inf. NUAHP I	F.M.C LOKOJA	Top-Union Executive	6th July, 2018
4	Inf. NARD 2	F.M.C LOKOJA	Top-Union Executive	3rd August, 2018
5	Inf. NMA 2	F.M.C LOKOJA	Top-Union Executive	3rd August, 2018
6	Inf. NARD 1	F.M.C LOKOJA	Top-Union Executive	2nd May, 2018
7	Inf. NUAHP 2	F.M.C LOKOJA	Top-Union Executive	6th July, 2018
8	Inf. MEDP 1	F.M.C LOKOJA	Top-Union Executive	16th May, 2018

Source: Authors' Compilations (2018).

Thematic Analysis of Qualitative Data

Interviews were carried out to complement the findings of the quantitative study. The primary aim was to examine the relationship between negotiation and employees' commitment in the Nigerian health sector. Therefore, in line with the objective of this study, the relationships of the variables were examined and submissions of the respondents analysed using Nvivo 12 software for the thematic analysis. Therefore, the following findings for which each theme answered the research question, anchored on the relationship between negotiation and employees' commitment in the Nigerian health sector at the Federal Medical Centre, Lokoja discovered a theme and four sub themes that described the relationship.

Employees' Commitment

During the process of interview of some of the senior members of staff of the tertiary health institutions on the issue of employees' commitment; team spirit, job safety and security, salary relativity and career development are the main themes that came out as some of the burning issues bedeviling the Nigerian health sector.

Employees' commitment is the mental and emotional connection and the attendant affection of an employee towards an organisation. This is supported by the work of Mowday, Steers, and Porter, (1979).
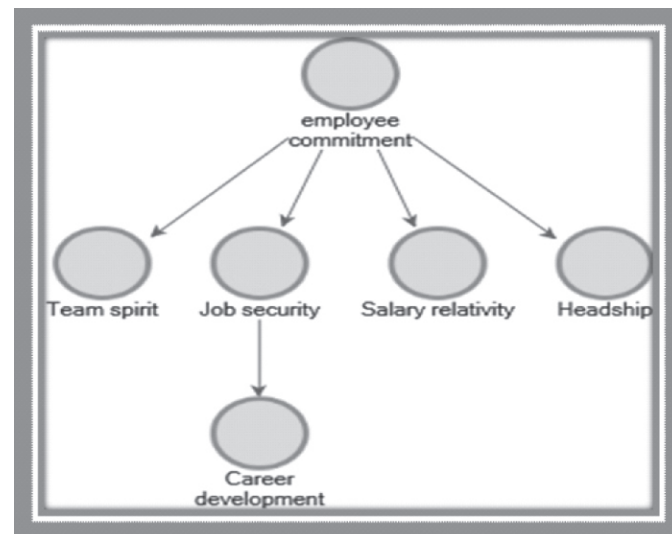

Figure 1: Informants' perception on employees' commitment
Source: Authors' Computation (2018).

Team Spirit

Team spirit is the feeling of togetherness and innate connection that exists among the members of a team that prompts them to give their best to the organisation. It is also a collaborative effort of a team to achieve common goal. This is supported by X & Y theory developed by Douglas McGregor (1960).

Similarly, NARD 1 also talked about this issue of team spirit in his words

> Employers should encourage employees to cooperate and build team spirit amongst themselves so as to build bound and lasting relationship among themselves which would in turn affect service delivery. Career opportunities should also be provided for employees to develop their chosen career to the peak.

In the same vein NUAHP2 on the same issue of team spirit has this to say "medical and health workers should have common bound which leads to team spirit and in turn leads to performance"

Another executive member of Nigerian Medical Association also asserts Relationships in hospitals should be improved in order to get every stakeholders participate in making the system work better for efficient service. Organisational politics where actions of individual workers are put on the front burner at the detriment of the common interest, should be discouraged.

Job Security

This is the assurance that an employee would not be booted by his employer on flimsy ground in as much as he is performing his task as required. Job security is such that a person with the job would have a small chance of becoming unemployed. It is also the knowledge of keeping your job without the risk of being unemployed.

NARD1 also supported the issue of job security in his words "When employees have great affection for their jobs they are generically committed to their works without any pressure from their superiors. Also, the issue of job security is crucial to the commitment of staff to their organisation. Government should ensure that employees are assured of the safety of their jobs, doing this, they are allayed of the fears of job-loss or retrenchment."

Similarly, another medical practitioner- NMA2- also corroborated that job security affects staff performance in the health sector if properly handled, He remarked thus:

"Employees' commitment is a product of so many factors as stated earlier, ranging from team spirit which comes as a result of good inter personal relationship in the hospital environment, to job security; this is about individual workers not being pressured by their employers by threatening them with sack, suspension, cut in pay and other form of punitive measures which create in the mind of workers.

In addition to the above, JHS1 also aligned in his submissions to those of others who have earlier talked about job security as a catalyst for efficient service delivery in hospitals, here are excerpts of his interview:
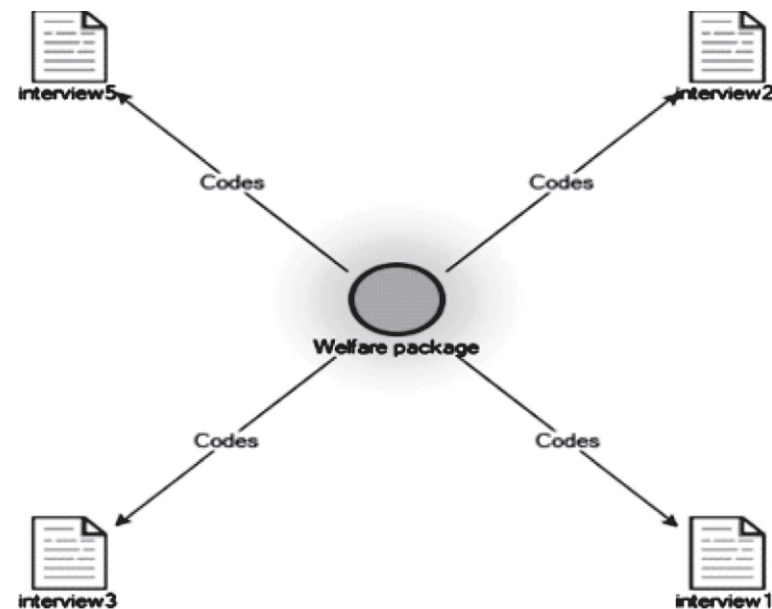

Figure 4.2 Perception on Welfare package
Author's Illustrations (2018).

Salary Relativity

Salary or pay relativity process is designed to objectively design each member of staff's salary in line with benchmark information or relevant pay progression

framework in order to ensure parity between colleagues undertaking similar roles (and performance), take account of external changes in the pay market and recognize excellent performance.

In addition to the above, NMA2 also had this to say about the contending issue of salary relativity in in the Nigerian health sector, "While doctors are not averse to other health workers asking for salary increment, what we cannot allow is the abolishment of salary relativity".

In the same vein Interviewer 2 also dwelt on the subject matter of salary relativity, and I quote "Another nagging issues in the health sector is the issue of salary relativity, This is based according to the profession you belong in the health sector, while the doctors encourage it other healthcare professionals see it as an avenue to favour the doctors at their detriment. By resolving this salary relativity issue they will be committed to their jobs and lead to efficient service delivery"

Headship

The Nigeria health sector is bedeviled with so many conflicts due to what is perceived as the overbearing and domineering influence of medical doctors over all other professionals in the health sector. Departments, units and other sections in hospitals are being headed by medical doctors at the detriment of other healthcare professionals as pharmacists, medical laboratory scientists, anatomists and so on.
In addition, it is on record that only medical doctors are appointed chief medical directors in hospitals, while other professionals like pharmacists, Laboratory scientists are not allowed to reach the peak of their careers.

Career Development

Preparation to leadership roles, access to headship, and leaders' professional career development are core concerns in health sector all around the world and have today a high position in the political agenda of most decision makers.

Different, parallel causes underpin the increasing interest in leadership development, an issue that has suddenly become a core focus of education systems only in the 1990's, after having attracted very little attention for long. On the one hand a main reason that has induced governments to promote leadership as leverage for healthcare improvement is likely to be the evidence of the relevant variation in the countries' health performance, brought to light by international

organisations integrated in a continuous, life-long learning process (Nicolaidou, 2008).

However, the JHS1 in his interview buttressed the above narration in his submissions "The issue of welfare package which included welfare package is a typical example of what constitutes conflict in the health sector, for example, A trainee doctor who is on residency earning more than a director in the laboratory is absurd.

Also, when it comes to monetary reward, the issue of call-duty- allowance readily comes to mind, while some doctors collect call-duty allowance for not doing much, this makes other health professionals feel aggrieved with. Also, doctors are given opportunities to develop their career while other professionals are left to their faith. An example is the residency period for doctors being extended from six (6) years to ten(10) years without them even asking for it.

Similarly, NUAHP3 also toe the line of the former speaker by saying ": Improved welfare package and reward system should be encouraging as those issues brew lots of conflict in the healthcare sector. Medical and other healthcare professionals should also be encouraged to develop their careers by supporting them with grants in order for them to reach the peak of their careers. When workers do well on their job they should be recognized by way of awards and commendation so as to exert a repeat performance".

Conclusion and Recommendations

Negotiation as a tool of conflict management used by the selected health institutions has major influence on employees' commitment as all the themes have a positive relationship with employees' commitment. Thus, well-structured conflict management strategies will lead to increased employees' commitment. Managers must have the abilities to understand negotiation skills and to deploy appropriate negotiation styles to extract the commitment of workers towards increased performance. The main role of managers is to understand the dynamics involved in negotiation which arises as a result of conflict determinants such as headship tussles, discriminatory pay structure, interpersonal relationship that brews disputes among doctors and other health professionals and the re-occurring issue of not honouring agreements signed during negotiation between the government and labour unions.

Therefore, it is recommended that the government should take the issue of signed agreements during negotiation very seriously in order get the commitment of employees' and to prevent future occurrence of conflict and as such public sector healthcare institutions should have defined laid down procedures for negotiation which should be time bound and judiciously followed in order to prevent unwanted strikes and work disruption. Also, management of tertiary healthcare institutions should expose themselves to the dynamics involved in negotiation.

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