MANAGING ROLE CONFLICT BETWEEN CAREER STAFF AND POLITICAL APPOINTEES

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ABSTRACT
Role conflict between career staff and political appointees is a common phenomenon in public sector organizations and the public service as a whole. This paper analyzes the dimension and nature of role conflict which impede cordial relationship between career staff and political appointees. The causes and consequences of role conflict on the performance, persistence and survival of public organization are revealed, as well as ways of dealing with role conflict in order to eliminate and ameliorate its negative impact. Empirical examples are presented which include the conflict between World Bank Consultants (Political Appointees) and career staff in the Federal Public Service. The paper recommended training, attitudinal re-orientation, goal reconciliation, professionalization of service and equitable distribution of reward among others. Role conflict is seen as an intricate element of contemporary public sector and must be properly managed to ensure effectiveness and efficiency through building harmony and team spirit.
Key words: Role Conflict, Political Appointees, Career Staff

INTRODUCTION
Career Staff and Political Appointees are human components of public sector organizations. In every organization, people interact with one another, which give form, pattern and structure to the organization. The Nigerian public sector comprises the public service and the civil service. The civil service encompasses government Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs). The public service includes all government parastatals and other enterprises in which government is in control of majority equity shares. In all these organizations there are Career Staff and Political Appointees. Sociologically, Max Weber (1947) considers bureaucracy as an ideal type of a formal group. All government organizations are bureaucratic in nature and social interaction in a group according to Ottong (2004) takes the forms of: exchange, cooperation and conflict. Our concern here is principally on conflict. This paper attempts to analyze the following issues: Conceptual and theoretical analysis of role conflict; The Career Staff, Political Appointees and their roles; Symptoms and causes of role conflict; Conventional conflict management processes; Strategies for preventing role conflict; Dealing with role conflict; Cases of role conflict; Prognosis of action; and Policy recommendations and conclusion.

Conflict is inevitable in every human setting. Since one can not do without conflict, the best approach is to device strategies and techniques of managing conflict in order to prevent the discontinuity of organizations that have important role to play in the society. A social role according to Ottong (2004), "is the dynamic aspect of a social position (status). It is the behavioral pattern associated or expected of an occupant of a social position". Role strain or conflict refers to multiplicity of roles coupled with competing pressures and status inconsistencies (contradictory positions). In view of the sociological/conceptual definition of role conflict above, role conflict is used in this paper operationally to refer to disagreement existing between the Political Appointees and Career Staff in the course of performing their roles within the same public organization. Theoretically, conflict perspective is based on the notion that there are groups in the society that have different interests. Consequently, social arrangement in the society benefits some group at the expense of others. Since every group attempts to preserve their different interests, the likelihood of conflict is always present. Different groups pursuing their different interests are likely to clash and cause some level of instability in the system. Prominent conflict theorists include Karl Marx and Ralf Dahrendorf (Haralambos and Holborn, 2004). Political Appointees and Career Staff constitute two major work groups in public sector whose interests are likely to be at variance with one another. Consequently, conflict perspective provides a theoretical framework with which to analyze role conflict.

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CAREER STAFF AND POLITICAL APPOINTEES
Career Staff
Career Staff in governmental organizations are those employees who occupy permanent positions in a system that offers equal opportunities to all citizens to enter government service, equal pay to all employees doing work requiring the same degree of intelligence and capacity, equal opportunities for advancement, equally favourable conditions and equal participation in retirement allowance, and make equal demands upon the employees. Career Public Service is a service predicated on recruiting young men and women with capacity for learning and growth, training them in order to develop and utilize their attitudes, and offering them opportunities for advancement in responsibility and remuneration.

The main characteristics of career government service for a Career Staff include the following, as outlined by Tyagi (1981)
a.   Permanence of tenure of office – 35 years of service or 60 years of age, which ever comes first.
b.   There should be fairly large range of territorial jurisdiction of the government under which the employees have been employed.
c.   There should be equal opportunities of competing for government service for every citizen.
d.   There should be fullest freedom of advancement – junior to top position should be open.
e.   Positive steps have to be taken for providing means of personal growth, such as avenue for self development, and advancement corridors through in-service training.

Career Staff in public service may be technical engineers; administrative and planning personnel etc; professionals – doctors, pharmacists, surveyors etc; and common services – attendants, assistants, etc.

THE ROLE OF CAREER STAFF
The role of the Career Staff (civil servant) according to Adebayo (1986) include:
1.   To implement and execute the policies and decisions of those in authority who decide policy.
2.   To assist the policy-maker by gathering and supplying facts and information which will assist in decision making.
3.   Advising policy makers by pointing out various alternative means by which a decision can follow.
4.   Ensuring political neutrality in order to make for the continuity of government.

The goal of the Career Staff in carrying out his or her role is to ensure efficient and effective service delivery to the public through strict compliance with public service rules, guidelines and extant circulars.

POLITICAL APPOINTEES
Political Appointment refers to the power to distribute or appoint people to governmental or political positions. It is the act of selecting and assigning people to political positions. Most political positions except party offices are tenable in governmental organizations. Positions of Political Appointees in public service include: Ministers, Commissioners, Directors-General, Executive Secretaries, Executive Chairman of Commissions and extra-Ministerial Departments, Special Advisers/Assistants, Personal Assistants, Project Advisers and Heads of Parastatals, etc. These Political Appointees work side by side with Career Staff in order to achieve the goal for which the agency or organization was established to achieve.

ROLE OF POLITICAL APPOINTEES
1.   They are to make decision on major policy issues regarding the organization.
2.   They are to ensure that the Career Staff implement policies as expected and that policy goals are realized.
3.   They are to take decisions and make policy based on the technical advice of Career Staff
The Political Appointees perform their role strictly in line with the enabling law establishing the organization in which they are appointed to serve, as well as prevailing government circulars. The goal of the political appointee is different from the goal of the Career Staff. As the Career Staff strive to ensure efficiency and effectiveness in utilizing government resources to ensure quality service delivery, the political appointee is interested in expediency in resources utilization and service delivery in order to satisfy political interest which he or she is representing.

Consequently, there is no congruency in the interest of Career Staff and political appointees. Since the interest of these two groups and their goals are at variance with each other, there is likelihood of conflict in the performance of the roles associated with their positions in the service of government.

SYMPTOMS AND CAUSES OF CONFLICT

Conflict in organization does not necessarily manifest in form of anger or raising of voices. People could choose to ignore one another which may be even more damaging to the organization. It is common to observe the following symptoms of conflict as noted by Fernandez (2006: 6) and Oluboyede (2006: 12).

a. Aggressiveness, physical fight and raised voices.
b. Statements expressing negative feelings – jealousy, distrust among groups and individuals in the organization.
c. Individuals being prevented from getting their due rewards after performing well.
d. People choosing not to pass useful information to the others.
e. Individuals refusing to talk to one another or doing so with icy formality, sarcastic remarks or open aggression.
f. People setting up barriers – being unavailable or unapproachable only through their private rules and procedures
g. People using "sick off" or otherwise absent more frequently than normal.
h. Low morale and poor productivity, especially if the people concerned blame it on others.

These symptoms may be a consequence of any of the underlying causes of conflict in public sector organizations (Oluboyede, 2006: 14) as indicated in appendix 1

CONVENTIONAL CONFLICT MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

Since this gathering cut across public and private sector, it is appropriate to briefly summarize general procedure for conflict resolution in organization which specifically relates with industrial conflict or trade dispute, though not primarily the concern of this paper. There are two procedures for conflict management in the work environment: Procedural Agreement and Legal Provisions.

PROCEDURAL AGREEMENTS

This involves management of individual grievance and collective grievances, through established guidelines and statutory regulations. It involved industrial relation process which relates to management and employee conflict.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The Trade Disputes Act Cap 432 Laws of the Federation of Nigeria (LFN) 1990 provides the legal framework for the settlement of industrial disputes and grievances when the internal mechanism, as indicated above under the procedural agreement, fails. The Act specifically requires parties to any collective agreement for the settlement of trade disputes to deposit same with the Minister of Labour and Productivity. Options available under the Act include mediation, conciliation and arbitration. Since our concern is on role conflict between Political Appointees and Career Staff which is not an aspect of industrial relations, it will be appropriate to examine organizational dynamics and managerial strategies which could be useful in managing intergroup and interpersonal conflict within organization. This is because industrial relations conflict and disputes management framework (systems) excludes Political Appointees and Career Staff role conflict which is a peculiar characteristic of governmental organizations.

MANAGING ROLE CONFLICT IN PUBLIC ORGANIZATIONS
Strategies for Preventing Role Conflict between Political Appointees and Career Staff

Generally, it is believed that the best way to manage conflict is to prevent it from occurring; leaders in public organizations and regulators can do this to some extent, following the under-listed tips as provided by Fernandez (2006: 9). Political Appointees as leaders should not make decisions that will affect the work of Career Staff, without consulting them first. Both should not criticize each other's work unless they have practical suggestions on how to improve it. One should avoid making personal attacks on people behind their backs, and should discourage others from doing so.Political Appointees should not encourage formation of cliques or groups in public organizations except legally approved trade unions and professional associations. Do not act on

assumptions about how people feel. Check with them first. Demonstrate by good example how disagreement can be resolved without one or both parties being left with bad feelings. Political Appointees and Career Staff should accord one another mutual respect.

DEALING WITH ROLE CONFLICT

Conflict is dealt with when conflict already exists. This occurs when one is unable to prevent role conflict from emerging between Political Appointees and Career Staff. In this case the conflict must be dealt with, which may be through any or a combination of the following methods (Tyagi, 1981: 267); Ignore the conflict for a while with the hope that it will all blow over and be forgotten. This has worked in some cases – depending however on the nature and gravity of the conflict. Create and ensure dialogue between the conflicting parties with the aim of resolving the conflict. Gently persuade them to cool their disagreement out of respect for each other to ensure team's harmony. Help one another to understand each other's point of view and recognize its validity in the other's eyes. Persuade the conflicting parties to abandon their pursuit or individual goals in favour of the organizational goal. Refer the "antagonists" to some form of Ombudsman who commands some respect in the organization and regulatory agency legally empowered to provide conciliation. Separate Political Appointees from Career Staff when conflict is alarming only.

CASES OF ROLE CONFLICT

World Bank Consultants: In the second term of former President Obasanjo's Administration, World Bank Consultants were given over one year renewable contract appointments. This appointment was at the discretion of the various Ministers in some ministries. In some cases the routine schedules of career civil servants were covered by these consultants who were in reality "Political Appointees", some of whom lacked the requisite qualifications and experience to discharge strategic duties of which they were appointed. These appointments resulted in clashes of interest and roles between the Career Staff and the appointees. The end effect was delay in discharge of service due to long chain arising from increased number of consultants. The appointment of a Zoologist as World Bank consultant to Ministry of External Affairs without any qualification or previous experience in international affairs and diplomacy, left a lot to be desired, in terms of the appointee's ability in relating with trained career officials in the Ministry.

Ministers and Commissioners: Traditionally and statutorily, Ministers, Commissioners and Special Advisers are official Heads of Government Organizations (Ministries, Departments and Agencies). In that regard, they are part and parcel of the organizations which they are assigned to. Though Minister A will come and go, the position of a minister is permanent to that organization. Conflict between Ministers and Permanent Secretaries and other top Directors are inevitable. Such is noted by Adebayo (1986) analysis of the conflict between Super Permanent Secretaries and Ministers under Gowon's administration. Today this kind of conflict, though minimal, exists in federal, state and local government bureaucratic structures. In view of this, concrete action must be taken to prevent the collapse of public bureaucracy due to role conflict between Political Appointees and Career Staff.

PROGNOSIS OF ACTION

The following are recommendations towards policy formulation and administrative reforms to ameliorate and eliminate role conflict between Political Appointees and Career Staff in Nigerian Public Service.

Training: Career Staff are trained and developed as they progress along the hierarchy of their career in such institutions as Administrative Staff College of Nigeria (ASCON), recently established Civil Service College, and National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies. Specialized institutions should be established to train Political Appointees on Government Procedures, Public and Civil Service Rules, Regulations, Guidelines and the core-competence in the service of the Ministry to which one is appointed to serve. This will re-orientate the political appointees and prevent some of the causes of conflict earlier identified, such as wrongful interpretation of Circulars, Enabling Laws, Public Service Rules, etc by Political Appointees. The training also will reposition the Political Appointees and expose them to basic procedures in performing organizational tasks.

Evaluation of Educational Background: The educational background of people selected for political appointment must be critically evaluated, as well as that of Career Staff. Those without requisite qualification and

competence that match the qualification should not be so appointed to prevent appointments of mediocre that are conflict prone. Proper qualification and skill must be critically evaluated and cross matched.

Attitudinal Re-orientation: The political appointee looks at the Career Staff as subordinate, thus inferior. The Career Staff perceives the political appointee as intruder and incompetent. Both should consider each other as partners. The political appointee should perform decision making functions based on sound advice of the Career Staff. This attitudinal change should be incorporated into the routine training of Career Staff as well as the induction courses for Political Appointees.

Societal Value: The Nigerian society is a status society; people worship social positions. Preference for social position and accumulation of wealth in social position makes political appointment a lucrative venture. Consequently, the Career Staff is envious of the political appointee and unwilling to cooperate with such appointee for the success of the organization. Appointees should focus on the service associated with the office, and the passion should be success in service delivery not accumulation of wealth. This will prevent envy which breeds role conflict.

Equitable Distribution of Reward: The major reward in public service is salary. The high level of disparity between the salary of the Career Staff and of Political Appointees is another source of conflict. The Career Staff views himself as suffering for the Political Appointee to go home with the wealth of the state. The common wealth is domiciled in the sphere of Political Appointee. Increase in Career Staff take-home and reduction in the wide disparity will be a source of encouragement and motivation to Career Staff which will eliminate jealousy which breeds role conflict.

Reconciliation of Goal: The goal of the parties which is contained in the party's manifesto should be reconciled with the public service goal on the commencement of new government. This should be one of the tasks of such agency as Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies. Once there is goal congruency, conflict will be minimized. The political ideal of expediency should be considered in the light of efficient and effective resources utilization and optimal service delivery.

Elimination of Corruption and Sharp Practices: Government should intensify effort at eliminating corruption and other sharp practices like nepotism, tribalism and favouritism which are likely to breed conflict.

Appointment of Seasoned Career Staff to Political Positions: Seasoned and tested Career Staff should be appointed to political positions. This will ensure the utilization of their wealth of experience in uniting themselves with Career Staff thereby reducing conflict. Practical example is that of Local Government Service Commission in Cross River State.

Professionalization of Service: A professionalized service is of limited conflict, as employees pursue the calling of their career as regulated by government policy and their professional regulation councils. Little time is wasted on pursuing other side issues, rather attainment of career competence and height is the ultimate aim. Focus on professional as well as career growth and development limits time for interpersonal and group conflict.

CONCLUSION
Role conflict between Career Staff and Political Appointees is an intricate element of contemporary Nigerian public sector organizations. This kind of conflict is outside the realm of industrial relation conflict resolution system through collective bargaining, process of conciliation, mediation and arbitration. Managing role conflict between Political Appointees and Career Staff requires detailed understanding of object of conflict, sources of conflict and strategies of preventing and dealing with role conflict as discussed in this paper. It is recommended that adequate training for Career Staff and Political Appointees, sound educational background and requisite skills, attitudinal re-orientation be ensured. Service-oriented value system rather than status society value, equitable distribution of reward by reducing disparity between income of Political Appointees and Career Staff should be guaranteed. Reconciliation of public service goal with political parties goal, elimination of corruption and other sharp practices institutionalized. Finally, appointment of seasoned Career Staff to political positions and professionalization of service will help ameliorate and eliminate role conflict between Political Appointees and Career Staff.

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