

Theory of Information Interchange as a Theoretical Framework for Understanding Utilization of Information by Arbiters for Conflicts Resolution

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Abstract: *This paper discussed information interchange theory as a theoretical framework for understanding information use to resolve conflicts. The paper explained conflict, conflicts resolution and its theory, conflict is a situation in which people, group, or countries are involve in serious disagreement. While conflicts resolution is the act of putting disputants into agreement. The paper described information interchange theory as a framework on how information providers and information users make effective of and potential improvements to, the information communication process. The paper also explained the premises of the theory which include: providing, holding, withholding, accessing, and use of information. Paper also summarized some of the previous studies that adopted information interchange theory such as: a study conducted by Marcella and Bartex titled evaluation of the implementation of European information by public libraries in the U.K conducted by Marcella et al, effectiveness of parliamentary information services in the United Kingdom by Graeme et al among others. Finally the application of the premises of the theory was explained as a solution to guide to use the information in resolving conflicts.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Despite the enormous appointment of arbiters by the emirate council, for mediation and prevention of conflict among member of the community, yet, today we lived in a society that is conflict ridden. Among the most crucial activities of a community is its handling of conflict, for unless it can contain disagreement and control violence, it has little hope of surviving, Raymond Cohen (2001). For this reasons, the subject of conflict resolution has been of great theoretical and practical interest to researchers at both the domestic and international level. Conflict is a situation in which people, groups or countries are involved in serious disagreement or argument. Conflict is a clash of interests, values, actions, views or directions (De Bono, 1985). Conflict can also be seen as a situation in which two or more human being desire goal, which they perceive as being obtainable by one or other, but not both, Echezona (2007). These conflicts are mostly occurring in the community as couple, heritage and farm boundary conflict. Arbiters whose are imam, priest, village head, community leader, group leader and district head are expected to resolve conflicts which occur among their follower. The resolution should be acceptable by both parties in order to avoid further escalation of conflicts that would lead the intervention of police and other formal court. It is believed that poor flow and interchange of information within a given society is one of the major causes of conflicts. Colette et al. (2003) are of the view that shortening conflicts might seem to be most effective way of building a more peaceful society.

Concept of Conflict

When human beings come together there is bound to be conflict. This is because human beings have different background, interests and worldviews. These lead to differences in opinion. These differences in opinion could sometimes degenerate into aggression and violence. This conflict may first be noticed at the individual level, but may eventually spread to the larger society.

However, when it does get out of hand, it is necessary to break a long term resolution base on understanding of its underlying causes. This will ensure that resurgence does not arise. However conflict is commonly defined as an open clash between two opposing groups or individuals. Usually, the disagreement may be as a result of incompatibility of views, opinion or access to shared resources. In Nigeria, many of the conflicts bedeviling the polity have been communal and ethnic based.

The easiest way to understand the term conflict is to divide theories of conflict in functional, situational, and interactive. The followers of functional approach think that a conflict serves a social function and those who view a conflict as situational, suggest conflict as an expression under certain situations. The third theory views conflict as interactive. Functionalists usually ask the question: why is there conflict? What purpose does it serve? While situationalists ask: when do we have conflict? Under what circumstances does it occur? Interactionists' questions are: how does conflict occur? What methods and mechanisms are used to express it?

Conflict is viewed as natural due to life's uncertainty. Conflict is good and necessary because a conflict can stimulate innovative thinking when it is managed in the right way. Lacking conflict, thoughts and actions are performed because they are habitual. Conflict allows an examination of the necessity of these thoughts and actions. The third assumption points out that people find it easier to live with unresolved misunderstanding than facing the fact that fundamental differences do exist, they demand recognition and appropriate management (Ramsay, 2001).

Conflict resolution

To end or resolve a long-term conflict, a relatively stable solution that identifies and deals with the underlying sources of the conflict must be found. This is a more difficult task than simple dispute settlement, because resolution means going beyond negotiating interests to meet all sides' basic needs, while simultaneously finding a way to respect their underlying values and identities.

True conflict resolution requires a more analytical, problem-solving approach than dispute settlement. The main difference is that resolution requires identifying the causal factors behind the conflict, and finding ways to deal with them. On the other hand, settlement is simply aimed at ending a dispute as quickly and amicably as possible.

Conflict resolution approaches

One of the first to develop insight into the beneficial consequences of cooperation as an academic enquiry was Morton Deutsch. In his view, a number of factors like the nature of the dispute and the goals each party aims at are pivotal in determining the kind of orientation a party would bring to the negotiating table in its attempt to solve the conflict. Two basic orientations exist. These are competitive and cooperative. Deutsch further predicts the type of interactions which would occur between negotiating parties as a result of their disputing style. Cooperative disposition of the party would evoke an atmosphere of trust and eventually lead to mutually beneficial options for settlement. On the other hand, competitive approach leads to win-lose outcomes. Critics of this approach argue, both cooperation and competition are essential to some extent to effectuate resolution of conflict since negotiating a desirable agreement always includes common and diverse goals. Thus finding a balance between these two approaches is the key to successful negotiation. In the 1970s Kenneth Thomas and Ralph Kilmann identified five main styles of dealing with conflict that vary in their degrees of cooperativeness and assertiveness. They argued that people typically have a preferred conflict resolution style. Thomas and Kilmann's styles are:

Competitive: People who tend towards a competitive style take a firm stand, and know what they want. They usually operate from a position of power, drawn from things like position, rank, expertise, or persuasive ability. This style can be useful when there is an emergency and a decision needs to be made fast; when the decision is unpopular; or when defending against someone who is trying to exploit the situation selfishly. However it can leave people feeling bruised, unsatisfied and resentful when used in less urgent situations.

Collaborative: People tending towards a collaborative style try to meet the needs of all people involved. These people can be highly assertive but unlike the competitor, they cooperate effectively and acknowledge that everyone is important. This style is useful when you need to bring together a variety of viewpoints to get the best solution; when there have been previous conflicts in the group; or when the situation is too important for a simple trade-off.

Compromising: People who prefer a compromising style try to find a solution that will at least partially satisfy everyone. Everyone is expected to give up something and the compromiser him or she also expects to relinquish something. Compromise is useful when the cost of conflict is higher than the cost of losing ground, when equal strength opponents are at a standstill and when there is a deadline looming.

Accommodating: This style indicates a willingness to meet the needs of others at the expense of the person's own needs. The accommodator often knows when to give in to others, but can be persuaded to surrender a position even when it is not warranted. This person is not assertive but is highly cooperative. Accommodation is appropriate when the issues matter more to the other party, when peace is more valuable than winning, or when you want to be in a position to collect on this "favour" you gave. However people may not return favours, and overall this approach is unlikely to give the best outcomes.

Avoiding: People tending towards this style seek to evade the conflict entirely. This style is typified by delegating controversial decisions, accepting default decisions, and not wanting to hurt anyone's feelings. It can be appropriate when victory is impossible, when the controversy is trivial, or when someone else is in a better position to solve the problem. However in many situations this is a weak and ineffective approach to take.

Information flow and conflict resolution

Going by the ride of twenty-first century technology, information as a fifth factor of production is a phenomenon that can not be down played or waived aside if one is to remain current and relevant, hence the use of information marks the difference between the successful and the failures. Information is a tool, which is popularly used in creating awareness, sensitizing and concretizing people about issues and matters arising and affecting their individual lives.

In other word, information is a phenomenon on its own, and the ways they are being disseminated or communicated is another issues that equally important. Better still, information utilization is another end that shows how relevant and useful the disseminated information is, information is not an end by itself but a means to an end, hence the application of information communication and utilization as a measure in resolving or managing conflicts which form the basic of this research effort. Utilization of information in conflict resolution need a thorough effective information communication system which will help overcome these inequalities in information packaging which has greater influence in de-escalating and escalating conflicts in any community. Information utilization is of great importance in conflicts management. Poor utilization of well selected and tailored information to a variety of guidance as often in community using various channel of communication will help to deescalate conflicts.

Free flow of information is a right of the people which enables them to participate effectively in the process of economic, social and political activities in the society, and enhances education, knowledge and learning (Laloo, 2002). Therefore, for any nation to make meaningful impact in conflict prevention, peace promotion and conflict resolution, early warning information is needed.

Information interchanges theory

The theory of information interchange by Marcella and Bartex evolved over a number of years from the research on government service and citizen information behaviour at the regional, United Kingdom, and European level. With a background information science and communication research (e.g., work by Kuhlthau, 1991; Dervin, 1976; Ford, 1973; Wilson, 1981), the theory focuses on the importance of considering the roles and aims of both the information provider and the information user in assessing the effectiveness of, and potential improvements to, the information communication process.

A number of papers provide detail of the research evidence upon which the theory is based. The earliest of these involved an evaluation of the implementation of European information policy in the United Kingdom (Marcella & Bartex, 1997). It revealed the variety of contexts in which users might require information about the European institutions, while suggesting that individuals frequently lacked any motivation to seek such information or awareness that such information might be of value to them in their everyday lives. The study also highlighted a gulf between the European Commission's objectives in developing information services and the perspective of a potential user who is almost frequently apolitical. The European Commission focused largely on a desire to encourage a positive (political) response to Europe, if manifested or even disguised in an apparently altruistic desire to be more open and transparent in governing. The user's focus was on a personal value of information for making a decision, solving a problem, resolving a worry, or understanding a complex phenomenon (in line with Dervin, 1976). Moreover, the research suggested that each user might require this information in a range of different life contexts- educational, work-related, business, domestic, consumer-oriented, recreational, and political purposes. A second project investigated service provision and information needs at the national U.K. level, characterized as an exploration of "citizenship information" (Marcella & Bartex, 1999; Marcella & Bartex, 2000a; Marcella & Bartex, 2000b; Marcella & Bartex, 2001). It sought to develop a holistic understanding of the nature and use of citizenship information, its potential contribution to the individual's capacity to prosper and survive, and the ways in which access to information might highlighted again the tendency for services and researchers to conceptualize citizenship information in a far more literal and limited way than might the citizens who simply wanted to know what they needed to know in order to deal with the demands that life might throw at them.

Rationale for Using Theory of Information Interchange

Information interchange Theory is built upon the fundamental dichotomy between the information provider view and the user view. The provider seeks to generalize and work towards a baseline and poorly respond positively to the public sphere. In contrast, the user acts in a variety of contextualized roles, and varies in his or her level of expertise or 'informedness' prior to the interchange of information. The user view is multiple, rich and complex, with a variation in motivation to become highly informed dependent on the urgency and significance of information needed.

Construct of the theory

There are five construct of information interchange theory. Conflict resolution is explained using these construct. The construct include; providing, holding, withholding, accessing and use. And each of the premises is explained as follows.

Providing: This means that government provide information that made by law makers. This can be applying as the provision of information by disputants and witness to arbiters.

Holding: The information is in government custody. This means that information is in custody of disputants and their witness. They might hold information at a point and later release it.

Withholding: sensitive information is restricted. Any information that might escalate the conflict should be withheld.

Accessing: government provide access to information. This means that arbiters should be free to access information concern conflicts.

Use: the judiciary use such information to pass verdict. This can also applying as arbiters should make effective use of information to resolve conflicts.

Previous studies conducted using information interchange theory

Information interchange theory had been adopted by several researcher within and outside the field of library and information science profession for the purpose of study information seeking behaviour.

In a study conducted by Rita M. and Graeme B. (1997) with title "European Union information: an investigation of need amongst public library users in three Scottish authorities"- This study focuses on the needs of public library users in three Scottish authorities. The researcher was ask question initial member that use public libraries, other sources, types and reasons they might want use such information. A survey method using questionnaire and interview as instrument was used. The research reveals that few of the respondents had actively sough European information in the past. And obtained information from trade and industry department and Internet, while majority public libraries is their source, and sough employment opportunities information. the reason for obtain European information are educational/study, general interest, work reasons, job-seeking, among others. The researcher recommended the continuing wider view of the public libraries service in the support of range of economic, educational, and social activities on the part of users, in all of which there are likely to be demands for material providing a European perspective.

In the study conducted by Rita M. et-al (2000) with title "The effectiveness of parliamentary information services in the united kingdom"- the study describe the result of a pilot study, funded by economic and social research council (ESRC), which explored the effectiveness of parliamentary information and communication policies in the united kingdom, in term of the quality of the public information services provided by UK parliament in London and devolved legislatures in Scotland, Wales, and northern Ireland. the investigation consisted of two element: a series of in-depth interview with service providers, and interview with public carried out via road shows across the UK. The study ask question about nature of the parliamentary information services and public response to the parliamentary website which they were given an opportunity to explore during road shows. The study was used interview method to collected data. In the UK parliament, it is indicated that majority of staff answer enquiries through e-mail, while in Scottish and Wales the majority of enquiries were extended through telephone. All the participants undertook a search for the information on the subject of their own choice on one three parliamentary and devolved legislature websites and majority of them believed that website they examined have useful information sources and served a useful purpose. The researcher recommended, there should be proactive excursion into communities where advisors can discuss with individual ways in which they might benefit from use of new technologies.

In a study conducted by Ruth N. (2010) with title "Information access and use by legislators in the Ugandan parliament" This paper is adopted from original research on information challenges and possibilities for female legislators in the Ugandan parliament (Nalumaga 2009). Women were perceived as having occupied a less dominant and less privileged position in public life. Access to and use of information is presumed to be important in facilitating integration as well as legislative roles. However, the main theme for this paper is to explore information practices at the national level to highlight the influences of the context of legislative activities on the information behaviour of legislators. The focus is on information access and use through the formal structures of information provision and these include the parliamentary library and other libraries. The study was based on in-depth interviews with thirty-five members of parliament purposefully selected to put into consideration variations amongst groups represented in parliament. Findings revealed that women found difficulties in maintaining position. Responses from both female and male legislators on the use of the formal information infrastructures were obtained. Research services were accessed and used for various purposes.

Applications of information interchange theory in the utilization of information for conflict resolution by arbiters.

As discussed earlier, information interchange theory constitutes of five (5) construct that each of them is very essential in study of information seeking behaviour among citizen, in respect to access government information. These construct include: Providing: this means that government provide information that made by law makers; Holding: the information is in government custody; Withholding: sensitive information are restricted; Accessing: government provide access to information Use: the judiciary use such information to pass verdict.

The construct of information interchange providing, indicate that government provided what ever information that made by law makers to the citizen. This means that it's the responsibility of government feed up citizen with information generated by legislative. This means that there is positive relationship between supply of information and making judgment. Conflict couldn't be resolve without getting information concerned the conflicts. And the information must be providing at the right time for quick resolution. This construct can be use to ask questions like: do the parties in conflict provide the actual information that cause dispute among themselves, and if so do both of them agree with information provided? Do the witness provided complete information concerned the conflict that both parties satisfied?

The construct holding in information interchanges theory means all information are keep at the government custody. This indicates that there is no private ownership, all information are sources from the government. Citizen that needed information should consult government. The construct can be use to ask this question, do the arbiter hold the information provided by parties in conflict and their witness? Does the witness hold the information within themselves without intervention of one party?

Information interchange theory construct withholding is another factor of study information seeking behaviour. This idea refers to refrain from giving or granting information that would jeopardize national security. That is sensitive information are restricted. This construct can be use to ask questions as, do the parties in conflict or witness refrain from saying the words that tarnish the disputants image in public? Do the arbiters refuse to add information that would cause revulsion among disputants?

Another construct in information interchange theory is accessing information; the theory explains that government should provide access to information for the citizen. That is government provided access to information through various media. For citizen to make use of information, the information must be accessible any time without difficulty. This construct can be use to ask questions like: Do arbiters access information related to conflict from parties and witness as quickly as possible? Do arbiters access information from witness anytime when the need arise?

The construct of use in the theory is also an important variable for the study of information seeking behaviour. The theory explains that information acquired should put into purpose or service. The judiciary use such information to pass verdict. In this case information acquired from parties and witness would use by arbiter to make judgment. This construct can be use to ask question like this: do the arbiter use the information acquired from parties in conflict and their witness to drive a quick, satisfied and lifelong judgment?

II. CONCLUSION

The theory of information interchange premises indicate the extent to which information can be used by arbiters to achieved specified goals with effectiveness, efficiency and satisfaction in a context of use to resolve conflicts. Arbiters, disputants and witness value the premises in their course resolved conflicts. The theory will contribute to understand the information seeking behaviour of arbiters when try to resolved conflicts, the researcher expect that arbiters would make effective use of information while resolving conflicts, so as to have lasting, quick and acceptable judgement by both parties, without appeal to formal court.

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