

# The concept of intra-union conflict essay



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The concept of intra-union conflict is not much different from that of intra-group or intra-organizational conflict. However, before we delve into that argument, it is essential that we consider an authoritative view of the subject matter from the International Labour Organization (ILO). The ILO (2006) states that ‘Conflicts within the trade union movement’ is “A matter involving no dispute between the government and the trade unions, but which involves a conflict within the trade union movement itself, is the sole responsibility of the parties themselves.

This definition implies that trade unions like most other social organizations are prone to internal disputes and struggles. This is so because, as an ‘organization of workers’, unions ultimately exhibit the same group dynamics as that of any other social group in the society. To appreciate this stance, let’s consider a couple of definitions of both a trade union as well as an organization from some authors and web resources:

Sydney and Beatrice Webb (1897) defined a trade union as “a continuous association of wage earners for the purpose of maintaining and improving the conditions of their working lives”. Otobo (2005) explains that this definition among other things highlights the relative permanency of organization.

Also, according to Wikipedia, the online encyclopedia, “A trade union (or labor/labour union) is an organization of workers who have banded together to achieve common goals like better working conditions ... Wikipedia Further defines an organization as “...a social arrangement which pursues collective goals, controls its own performance, and has a boundary separating it from

its environment. ... ” By linking the above definitions, one may see that a union as a combination of workers for the welfare of workers is basically nothing more than an organization and as such, expected to exhibit common organizational traits including of course, intra-group conflict.

Having established a connection between trade unions and their organizational nature, we may now look at some views on the subject matter, i. e. intra-group conflict, but before then, what is conflict? According to Krish (2009) “ Conflict is defined as the existence of, or the perception of existence of, resource competition, opposing interests and differences of opinion and incompatible values... While conflict in itself, by default, arises with differences, it is debatable if organizational conflict is good or bad or neutral from the organization’s perspective.

It is a fact that conflict, if left unregulated, can spiral out of control and lead to unwarranted consequences. ” He goes on to explain that “...Conflict can be Functional (good), Dysfunctional (bad) or Quasi-functional (could be good or bad, depending on circumstances)”. Similarly, in an exposition of Gareth R. Jones and Jennifer M. George’s book, “ Contemporary Management. , Consador (2010) explains that Organizational conflict is the discord that arises when the “ goals, interests or values of different individuals or groups are incompatible and those individuals or groups block or thwart one another’s attempts to achieve their objective,” Jones and George mention four types of organizational conflict–interpersonal conflict (between individuals of the organization), intragroup conflict (within an internal group, team or department, typically involving more than one person within a group), intergroup conflict (conflict that arises across different organizations)

and interorganizational conflict (conflict that arises across different organizations) Intra-union conflict Krish (2009) states that “ Conflict, when occurs within a group, is termed “ Intra-Group conflict”.

Even within one organization or team, conflict can arise from individual differences or ambitions as mentioned earlier; or from rivalry between sub-groups or factions. All leaders and members of the organization need to be alert to group dynamics that can spill over into conflict. This statement is mirrored by Wahlig (2010) who shares that “ Intragroup conflict is distinctive in that it occurs between members of a group or team who are theoretically united over a common characteristic or objective...intragroup conflict is marked by verbal disagreements between group members that could result ultimately in the fracturing of the group into distinct and opposing parts.

She advanced two main types of intra-group conflict as relationship conflict and task conflict: an intragroup relationship conflict means that members of the group struggle with interpersonal relationships regardless of the task or objects of the group, while a group is experiencing a task conflict when members of the group disagree about the best practices for achieving an objective or struggle to agree on an appropriate objective. According to Wahlig, in either type of intragroup conflict, members are at risk of damaging personal relationships and failing to achieve common goals or objectives. In the context of trade unions, this could mean for example, distracting group members from being assertive during collective bargaining negotiations with management.

Causes of Intra-union conflict The sources of intra-union conflict could be either internal or external. In the words of [www. etu. org. za](http://www.etu.org.za): Causes or sources of organizational conflict can be many and varied. The most common causes are the following:

- scarcity of resources (finance, equipment, facilities, etc)
- different attitudes, values or perceptions
- disagreements about needs, goals, priorities and interests
- poor communication
- poor or inadequate organizational structure
- lack of teamwork
- lack of clarity in roles and responsibilities

However, Feral (2010) suggests that “ Intragroup conflict...can also be caused or exacerbated by power dynamics within the group”.

This is very evident when one takes the history of the Nigerian trade union movement into consideration. Intra-union conflict has more often than not resulted from internal power struggles under various circumstances, thereby leading to factionalism and jurisdictional disputes between rival forces within a given union. Such factional disputes and conflicts among the leaders are arguably the singular most potent source of discord within Nigerian trade unions. According to Fashoyin (2005), “ Oftentimes, a particular leader or group of workers did not want to have anything to do with the existing union, on the assumption that the latter could no longer protect their interest.

Remote to such arguments however, was the struggles for union leadership and union control. ” Another cause of intra-union conflict in Nigeria advanced by Fashoyin has been the role of Nigerian unions in international labour politics. Prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union, this had to do with ideological affiliations to the two leading world bodies, i. e. the pro-West WFTU and the pro-East ICFTU and the financial benefits of such affiliations.

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He asserts that "...a major contributing factor to disunity was the fact that most virtually all the central labour organizations of the 1960s and 1970s derived most of their finances from international trade unions.

According to the well documented investigation of the internal affairs of the central trade unions of 1976, they were virtually financed by external bodies.

" Solutions to Intra-union conflict The following are possible solutions to some intra-union disputes as identified by [www. etu. org. za](http://www.etu.org.za): Negotiation: this is the process where mandated representatives of groups in a conflict situation meet together in order to resolve their differences and to reach agreement. It is a deliberate process, conducted by representatives of groups, designed to reconcile differences and to reach agreements by consensus. The outcome is often dependent on the power relationship between the groups. Negotiations often involve compromise - one group may win one of their demands and give in on another.

In workplaces Unions and management representative usually sue negotiations to solve conflicts. Political and community groups also often use this method. Mediation: when negotiations fail or get stuck, parties often call in an independent mediator. This person or group will try to facilitate settlement of the conflict. The mediator plays an active part in the process, advises both or all groups, acts as intermediary and suggests possible solutions. In contrast to arbitration (see below) mediators act only in an advisory capacity - they have no decision-making powers and cannot impose a settlement on the conflicting parties. Skilled mediators are able to gain trust and confidence from the conflicting groups or individuals.

Arbitration: means the appointment of an independent person to act as an adjudicator (or judge) in a dispute, to decide on the terms of a settlement. Both parties in a conflict have to agree about who the arbitrator should be, and that the decision of the arbitrator will be binding on them all. Arbitration differs from mediation and negotiation in that it does not promote the continuation of collective bargaining: the arbitrator listens to and investigates the demands and counter-demands and takes over the role of decision-maker. People or organizations can agree on having either a single arbitrator or a panel of arbitrators whom they respect and whose decision they will accept as final, in order to resolve the conflict.