

Makerere: Crisis management versus management by crisis

NORBERT MAO > FAIR AND SQUARE



Let's state our argument at the outset. Three things drive conflict in Makerere. First is personal behaviour of the conflicting parties. Second is structural factors. Third is communication factors.

Our view is that the

Makerere is structured makes it conflict prone and in the absence of inbuilt conflict management and resolution mechanisms it will always be in turmoil.

The current university structure is based on 'clientelism'. The bosses have politically well placed overlords who call the tunes thus downgrading administration into a puppet show. We have heard stories of appointments and promotions based not on merit but on other considerations, including nepotism. This provokes jealousy and uneasiness among those passed over. This makes for unhealthy competition between the various hierarchies. This in turn creates an extremely stressful work environment.

Those of us who have been involved in conflict resolution know that not all conflict is bad. Conflict can be either constructive or destructive. A conflict is said to be constructive because it is functional while a conflict is said to be destructive because it is dysfunctional. In a functional conflict, the conflict manifests itself as a sign of growth and it is healthy and welcomed. A functional conflict is based on mutual respect but allows and encourages the constructive challenging of ideas, beliefs and assumptions. It is useful to the organisa-

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tion. On the contrary, dysfunctional conflict increases discontent and dissatisfaction, undermines the wellbeing of the organisation and sharply reduces the organisational efficacy. The conflict in Makerere falls in the latter category. It is destructive and thus dysfunctional.

In conflict theory, conflict management style is the behavioural pattern someone shows when facing a conflict. The five unique conflict management styles are: Competing, integrating, avoiding, obliging and compromising. First, is the competing style, which the vice chancellor has adopted, the manager shows high concern for self and low concern for others. He must win. Others must lose. Conflict theorists discourage this style because it creates frustration and acts as a curtain raiser for even more conflict. It even blocks any avenue to finding common ground. Those who resort to the competing style are generally considered less effective by subordinates.

For comparison purposes, let us also examine the other styles that for whatever reason Prof Barnabas Nawangwe has chosen to ignore. Our view is that he wants to thrive on chaos. He wants to operate in

crisis mode because solving the crisis may make him stronger.

Second, is integrating, also known as the collaborating and problem solving style is about high concern for self and others. Its orientation is a win-win. In this style, one tries to satisfy the desires and concerns of all parties in order to achieve an equally advantageous outcome. This style is critical when both parties concerns are important and cannot be compromised. Third is the avoiding style. It is about low concern for self and low concern for others. It is a lose-lose orientation.

Fourth, is the obliging or accommodative style. It represents low concern for self and high concern for others and is seen as a lose-win orientation. Here, relationship preservation is more important than the interests at stake.

Fifth, is the compromising style. It means a balanced or intermediate concern for self and others. Here, each party works cooperatively and gives up something in order to reach a compromised solution to the conflict. There are no winners or losers.

Makerere has a complex and unique structure. It is a mix of horizontal and vertical elements in terms of lines of authority, decision making and accountability. One can describe it accurately as organised anarchy technically equal with garbage can models. Such a structure is conflict prone. It thus requires an inbuilt conflict resolution mechanism.

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