

An Overview of Industrial Conflict and its Challenges to National Development

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Abstract

One of the major characteristics of modern Societies is a complex organization which serves as a whole that engulf many individuals in a pursuit of large administrative task. To compliment these, the workers are governed by service condition with rules and regulations established by their employers. The result of power imbalance leads to employer and employee disagreement or conflict. This has far reaching implications to the development of the Nation. Hence, labour plays a crucial role in the quest for the Country's development despite its current economic situation. However, the paper examines Industrial Conflict in Nigeria, its root, causes and effects to National development. Frustration Aggression theory was used as theoretical framework. As a descriptive type of study, the study utilizes Secondary sources such as Newspapers, Journals, and Textbooks as sources for data collection. The study discovers that a grievance as a result of low wages, poor working condition and lack of promotion leads to conflict. That strike of any nature impedes the development of the organization as well as the Nation. From the study, the Paper concludes that despite the

functions of Industrial Conflict (Strike) it is bad for the society. It however recommends that owners of Industries and Employees should produce a communiqué that will better reduce conflicts. Employers of labour should also ensure that their employees are adequately motivated so as to increase productivity and job satisfaction. It is also recommended that government should ensure that Industrial Relations Act is adhered to properly so as to reduce conflict reoccurrence.

Introduction

It is clear that organizations are set up with the purpose of achieving certain objectives. Inherent in this is that employees must perform their job adequately; and for this to be met the employers must perform crucial roles efficiently with a cordial relationship with their employees. It is no doubt that labour force or employees occupy a very strategic place in the society and its roles have paved way to nation building and development. Indeed employees and owners of Industries have a long history of relationship preoccupied with issues of productivity and motivation borrowed from the scientific management thought of Taylor (1911) and Human relation approach to work in (1920). Although one cannot deny the fact that conflict is inevitable in any complex organization due to the diversity of religious, values, goals and interest. Deustch (1977) cited in Mba (2013) argued that it is virtually impossible for individual or groups with diverse background, skills, values and norms to work together without disagreement or conflict. Industrial conflict refers to any expression of dissatisfaction within the employment relationship specifically those pertaining the employment contract and the collective bargaining (Gordian 1998).

Conflict in Nigerian Industries has become a repeated phenomenon that has bedevilled the public sector and impedes the country's development right from the pre-independence to post independence era. This is evident in the frequencies of Industrial actions such as strike, absenteeism to mention these

two till present. The country has witnessed series of Industrial conflict pertaining employment issues in organizations. Statistics from the National University Commission (2002) has shown that Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) has embarked on strike 23 times since 1999 in order to meet her demand. Nasarawa State University and Nasarawa State Polytechnic are no exception on these conflicts. Peculiar to these Institutions are disputes that affect employment relations, wages, fringes benefit such as Earn Academic Allowance (EAA), irregular payment of workers' salaries, non implementation of the Consolidated Polytechnic and Colleges of Academic Salary Structure (CONPCASS) and issues that affect promotions to mention these few.

This is evident with the series of strike that have taking place in Nasarawa State University, keffi. In January, 2011 Academic Staff of the University embarked on strike that lasted for over nine months. Consequently, the chapter declared a strike on the 7th Feb, 2016 that lasted for three months. Similarly the strike of non implementation of CONPCASS in 2012 led Nasarawa State Polytechnic students on rampage that killed two students. This has far reaching implications on the academic performance of the students as well as the professional advancement of staff. Furthermore, the Joint Health Sector Union strike from 18th April to 13th of May, 2018 impedes National development and made many Nigerians who could afford medical services abroad flew for medical treatment. This implies that the health sector has loose revenue as a result of the conflict. Sociologist over the years have little concern over what causes conflict in an organization rather focused in what brings workers together specifically the works of Max Weber (1920). Industrial conflict is a serious problem concerned with employment relations such as wages, organizational policies or government policies as well as working environment. These have far reaching implication on the development of the country. Development refers to a stage or process of where by a society progress from one particular state/stage to another, where the second stage is judged as being developed. Several studies have examined the causes and effects of industrial conflict in Nigeria but this paper tend to look at the types, causes, effect to national development and to recommend proper measure on how to tackle or reduce the high rate of industrial conflict in the country. As a descriptive type of study the paper utilizes

secondary sources of data such as the News Papers, Journals, textbooks and magazine in it sources.

Concept of Industrial Conflict

Lederach (1995) described conflict as an ongoing situation that is based on deep seated differences of values, ideologies, and goals. In support of this definition, Fisher, Ury, & Brett, (2004) defined conflict as a relationship between two or more parties (individuals or groups) who have or think they have incompatible goals. It therefore implies that conflict is a continuous interaction that span through lifetime of man and not just a one-off relationship. Also, one of the most quoted traditional definitions of conflict describes it as struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power and resources in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralize, injure, or eliminate their rivals (Coser, 1956:8). This description of conflict explains the reasons why workers are often ready to ground all economic or productive activities via strike in a bid to get their demands met. In corroboration with Coser's definition of conflict, Constantino, Cathy & Merchant, (1995) described conflict as the process of expressing dissatisfaction, disagreement or unmet expectations with any organizational interchange.

Otite, (2001) conceptualization, conflict is a way of settling problems originating from opposing interests and from the continuity of society. Ajala (2003) succinctly summarises the discourse on conflict when he said conflict is the mechanism which keeps society going. According to Isard (1992) Pondy (1967) organizational conflict can best be understood as a dynamic process underlying organizational behavior. This is a very broad definition that excludes very little of anything transpiring in a group or individual. Tedeschi (1973) take a middle position, defining conflict as "an interactive state in which the behaviours or goals of one actor are to some degree incompatible with the behaviours or goals of some other actor or actors"

Agbalajobi (2010) perceived conflict as a natural expression of social differences and of humanity's perpetual struggle for justice and self. Based on this, conflict is regarded as necessary part of human life. It is a fluid and infinitely elastic concept which can be twisted to mean differently which scholars have wrestled on the causes and effects. In this paper the focus is

industrial conflict. Industrial conflict entails a conflict of interest exist in the work place between the employer and the employee. There is no single definition of industrial conflict but the concept implies clashes of interest as it relates to work or complex organizations. Industrial conflict refers to the discord that occurs when the goals, interest or values of different groups or individuals are incompatible with each other which often frustrate each other's attempt to their objectives (Jones & George and, Hill, 2000).

Ajayi (2002) contended that Industrial conflicts that exist between groups as a result of interaction in the work place. In Gordian (1998) definition, industrial conflict is an expression of dissatisfaction within the employment relationship specifically those pertaining the employment contract and the collective interest of the organization. This definition implies that industrial conflict does not only mean conflict between the owners of industries and the workers alone but also conflict occurs when the organizational interest and goals are affected. This is most evident in the present day Nigeria, for example the recent Academic Staff Union of Universities Nasarawa State University, Keffi chapter strike of Feb, 2016 which is as a result of nonpayment of Earned Academic Allowances, issues that affect employment and promotion as well as funding of the university. Similarly the strike embarked by the Association of Medical Doctors of Nigeria in July, 2017 as a result of hazard allowance crippled the health institutions which resulted to scores of death as a result of medical issues.

Marshall (1994) also gave a more related view of Industrial conflict to that of Gordian (1998) where he contended that conflict occur as resulting from one incompatible interest of employees and employers in the workplace, disagreement arising from terms and condition of employment. Owens (1995) contended that conflict occurs where there is incompatibility of activities. Conflict is a state of disharmony that could be brought about differences of impulses, desire or tendencies (Canavan & Monahan, 2001). In the thought of Ibukun, (1997) Industrial conflict is a form of disagreement between the employees and the employers which often result to strike. Industrial conflict in the views of Akanji (2005) is the clash of interest and resulting dispute of varying intensity between individuals, groups in work organization. Fajana (2000) compliment this definition by adding that industrial conflict is the inability of these parties either between employer and employee or within

groups to reach agreement connected with employment relations whether or not the inability results in strike or any other form of action.

Where as in the views of Smyth (1977) Industrial conflict is the inability of two conflicting bodies to reach agreement on any issue connected with object of industrial interaction whether or not the conflict result in strike or any other protestation. Ubeku (1983) argued that conflict occur in an organization as a result of motivational factors. That is why owners of Industry/Enterprise and Managers wrestle to motivate workers to work so as to enhance productivity, performance and satisfaction. Though scholars varied as to what factor motivate employees. But the general idea is that motivation is what triggers behavior, it is a channel that prompt an action.

Basically Industrial conflict in spite of its inevitability, it is a waste of time and material resources which affect the nations development. This paper evidently agrees with this as development is basically an evaluative term which is within the individual level. When labour force of a country is in a temporal shot down, human activities will be affected. However, it should be noted that strike is not some as industrial conflict even though they are synonymous; Industrial Conflict is a long term contradiction of interest between owners of industries and workers connected with a specific issues that generate hostility and result to direct confrontation. It is an action where employees show their grievance by refusing to work or work slowly.

Taxonomy of Industrial Conflict

Interpersonal Conflict

This refers to a type of conflict between individuals or employees in an organization as a result of their diversity or difference in goals. Inherent in this type of conflict are Individual workers conflicting over values that are either scarce or limited. Another prototypical example of this conflict is that conflict arises as a result of some employees not supporting others in the organization. Deutsch (1973) referred to interpersonal conflict as vertical conflict. To him, the form of conflict is clearly expressed when a single value goes to one party but not the other. In another situation is where a sum of resources must be divided between parties. Hence, it is basically a relationship type of conflict between management and employees.

Intra group Conflict

This type of conflict arise group because of scarcity of freedom, position and resources. People who seek power struggle with others for positions or status. Inherent in this are formal group within the complex organization conflicting over resources. Union's election. Deutsch (1973) referred to this type of conflict as contingent form of conflict. To him, expression of these conflicts depends on power struggle over reward and recognition.

In the same vein, Handy (1983) suggests different situations in which conflict can arise. These are listed below together with examples in construction.

Formal objectives overlap. A consulting engineer may have as one of his objectives the long term safety and stability of a bridge or building. Whilst these are also important to a construction firm, the firm is primarily concerned with cost and profit margins. The engineer who requests unplanned changes at various stages of the project to keep safety tolerances high, perhaps responding to new information, can meet with resistance from the main contractor and subcontractors in line with their objectives.

Role definitions overlap. This can lead to conflicting objectives. For example, in the installation of building services a conflict may arise over who has responsibility for quality assurance. The site agent working for the main contractor may regard it as the clerk of work's responsibility, who may in turn regard it as the site agent's, insisting that his own role is not to 'inspect in' quality but rather to verify quality has been achieved.

Roles are simultaneous. An organisation or an individual may provide both services and coordination. This is typical of the architect's dual role as lead designer and project manager. It may not always be clear to other participants which is the current role. There may be hidden objectives. The architect may be looking towards future design awards, rather than only the client's needs; or the main contractor may put in an unrealistically low bid to secure a contract during a period of very poor business.

Causes of Industrial Conflict

The cause of Industrial conflict can be traced to so many factors which as a result of express of dissatisfaction with other workers or with the owners of the enterprises or capitalist as Lenin (1960) pointed. The case of the dissatisfaction

usually is as a result of what or that affect employment relation, motivation and productivity. Industrial conflict has a spill over effect on the social system specifically in the organization when man hour (working hours) are lost, threat and use of force to register discontentment and how level turn over to mention these few.

Myres (1954) Yesufu (1984), and Adeleke, (1983) traced the causes of Industrial conflict to issues relating to wages, fringe benefit which renege the employment contract. Whereas Otobo (2005) said the causes of industrial conflict is often revolve around the complex organization which include management style, nature of environment, issues that affect promotion, legislation by the government.

However, this paper condenses the causes of industrial conflict to Internal and External sources.

- **The Internal Sources** of industrial conflict in Nigeria are the diversities within the organization. In this, workers are in a continuous conflict with colleagues that seems not to be in their favor and that share different belief about the organization's goals and objectives. Though this type of conflict does not usually leads to confrontation. Another internal source of conflict is the wage/salary, incentives for good work and also good working environment. This is no doubt the strongest or major causes of industrial conflict even though management/administrations wrestled to solve these problems. Conflict as a result of these factors is basically inevitable because it affect the workers welfare and is basically above individual grievances. Another factor under the internal sources in the relations of authority. Since all work organizations are bureaucratic in nature which placed individual in a hierarchy. This in turn if not follow properly as Mitchell (1920) argued as iron law of oligarchy – then conflict is inevitable.
- **External Sources:** The external sources of conflict here involve government policies which directly or indirectly affect work organizations. For example issues of tax (pay as you earn), devaluation of the naira (currency), to mention these few. This source of conflict has affected Nasarawa State University, Keffi in 20016 where the University went on Strike demanding the State Government to reduce the tax rate. Also the increase in petroleum price in 2015 which led the labour Unions such as the

Nigerian Labour Congress, the PENGASON, ASUU, NUT to mention these few to embark on nationwide strike which did not only impede organizational progress but also affect foreign direct investment; thereby reducing the revenue generation from foreign countries.

Concept of Development

The term development has been defined by numerous scholars to mean a qualitative and evaluative term. Development is the process whereby a nation improves the socio economic and political life of its people. It is a process that creates growth, progress and positive change that is physical, economic and environmental which is judged by a rise in the level and quality of life, creation and expansion of income of the people. Sen (2001) defined development as a tool enabling people to reach the highest level of their ability through granting freedom of actions; that is freedom of economic, social and family actions. This definition aligned to the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), 1990 report on Human Development Index (HDI) which permits human advancement.

Contrast to this definition, conflicts, wars, natural disasters and poverty impede development. Seer (1970) sees development based on measurable conditions of social reality. It implies a reduction in poverty, inequality and unemployment. United Nations World Development Report (WDR, 1991) sees development based on the improve of the quality of life, which includes better education, higher standard of health, nutrition, less poverty and clean environment. The above definitions show that industrial conflict is a major impediment to development of any country because it affects the economic, social and political life of the people as well as the nation.

Theoretical Framework

Frustration aggression theory

Frustration aggression theory is a theory rooted from the works of Berkowitz (1962) and Yates (1962). It is a theory that explains conflict behaviour as a result of inability of an individual or group to fulfil their needs. Basically the theory explains the cause of conflict using or relating it to theories of motivation and behaviour as well as frustration and aggression. Proponents of

this school points the difference between what people feel they want or deserve to what actually they get, that is the “want-get-ratio as the cause of conflict. In situation where expectations are not met is for people involve or parties to confront those they hold responsibility for frustrating their needs or ambitions. The main explanation of this theory is that aggression does not occur as a natural reaction or instinct but as the result of the outcome of frustration where the legitimate desires of individuals or groups is denied either directly or indirectly. The feelings of disappointment may lead such people to express their anger through violence directed to those responsible for their aggression. In a situation where feelings of frustration become widespread among the population and the feeling is that people are getting less than they deserve in their organization, they engage into conflict and agitations demanding their desires. A prototypical example of this explanation is the union’s strike in complex organizations. For example, the joint strikes which include the Nigeria Labour Congress, PENGASSON and Academic Staff Union of Universities as a result of fuel subsidy removal MEND who resort to violence as a result of oil exploration in their land.

Effects of Industrial Conflict on Nigerian Development

Conflict is a serious problem in modern organizations. In many cases, it wastes precious human resources that would be better directed to other activities, including the primary work of the organization. Though as mention earlier in this study, strike is a not the same as industrial conflict but it is a form of industrial conflict which often takes the name. Strike as a manifestation of industrial conflict is a temporal stoppage of work by a group of workers in order to express their grievance or enforce a demand. The term has many ways workers use to exercise it, such as go-slow, informal refusal to cooperate, obstruction of new policies either by government or the management of such organization. Hence it is a form of collective action. As an approved exercise which is agreed by the employer and employees and government, strike is considered the rule of the game. For this paper, strike is a necessary evil for greater good which does more harm than it heals; it is more destructive to economic and social life of the people and the society at large.

Fajana (2000) contended that the effect of Industrial conflict is on both the workers on one hand and on the owners and managers on the other hand which leads to loss of production, output, loss of profit, inability to meet the demands of customers and tend to rupture good relationship between the two parties involved. It also affects workers income because managers and owners of industries have now device means of no work no pay which has a multiplier effect on the development of the worker and his family at large. Another effect of Industrial conflict (strike) also affects national income, loss of revenue/national revenue; affect Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) because it is humans that are involved in Industrial relations. Another effect is on the informal sectors such as market women, Okada riders to mention these few.

Conclusion and Recommendations

It is no doubt that industrial relations have become the pillar of every industrialized state or nation and labour force constitute to the rapid development of every society. Yet because of the nature of some societies, labour relations were neglected resulting to conflict. The papers season the cause and effect of industrial conflict in Nigeria. The literatures reviewed revealed that industrial conflict is a phenomenon that is inevitable and that managers or owners of industries should try to reduce the occurrence of conflict in their organizations. Frustration aggression theory of Berkowitz et al (1962) provides an idea or explanation of the cause of conflict in our organization. This paper concludes that as inevitable as industrial conflict strike is not as same as IC rather a form of IC which is manifested as different form.

The study however, recommends that owners of enterprise should both adopt or use classical and contrary approach to industrial relations as workers have different goals and motivation. Since this paper contends the evil of strike as a form of Industrial Conflict which is a necessary evil for greater good. Administrators or owners of industries should continue to manage conflict and be prepared for any type of conflict. The study also recommends the party in spite of their differences or disagreement should come to terms when Bargaining because industrial conflict do more harm than good to both parties and the country at large.

Employers of labour should also ensure that their employees are adequately motivated so as to increase productivity and job satisfaction. It is also recommended that government should ensure that Industrial Relations Act on collective bargaining and negotiation to enable both the employer and the employees to work harmoniously and resolve grievances with dialogue within the shortest time possible. Furthermore, the study recommends for further research specifically on conflict management strategies since conflict is inevitable.

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