

**PROGRESSIVE DISCIPLINE AND ADVERSARIAL INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS
ATMOSPHERE OF ELECTRICAL ENGINEERING COMPANIES IN SOUTH-SOUTH, NIGERIA**

Bluejack, Asawoba Adam Ipalibo (Ph.D)
School of Foundation Study, River State Science and Management

ABSTRACT

This thesis explored the relationship between Progressive discipline and adversarial industrial relations atmosphere of electrical engineering companies in South-South Region, Nigeria. Using a cross-sectional survey research design, the study employed a positivist approach where the questionnaire was utilized as the major instrument. The theoretical framework was drawn from employment relation theory. The primary data were collected using two hundred and twenty five (225) employees drawn from the sample size of one hundred and forty four (144) was generated using the taro Yamane formula while Bowley's proportional allocation technique was used for the individual company sample size. For data collection 144 copies of the questionnaire were distributed depicting 100%. The sample subjects were obtained using the simple random sampling technique. The unit of analysis for the study are individual organizational members. Data were collected from a sample of 139 employees from 10 electrical engineering companies operating in South South Region, Nigeria. A total of 139 copies of the questionnaire were retrieved, depicting 96% response rate. A total of 131 copies were used, depicting 90%. For primary data analysis, the study applied mean, mode and standard deviation to test the variables. The Spearman rank correlation coefficient was used to test the hypothesized associations, using SPSS version 25. The study found that in electrical engineering companies there is a strong but negative relationship between progression discipline and adversarial industrial relations atmosphere. Based on the findings, it was recommended that: organizations should help employees understand the need for discipline and know why they should align with the work rules and standards of their organizations.

Keywords: Progression Discipline, Adversarial Industrial Relation

INTRODUCTION

The main focus of industrial relations in organizations is widely considered to be the development of peaceful relations that ensures mutual respect for parties and comprehensive solution to problems affecting the employment conditions of workers, as well as industry efficiency. Such parameters as sound recruitment policies, good union-management relations, effective communication, well articulated grievance procedures can improve labour-management relations which further fosters good or harmonious industrial relations atmosphere (Onasanya, 2005). However, the industrial relations system through which the industrial relations atmosphere can be identified may be highly formal with many levels and forms of rules and regulations to guide interactions, or it may be extremely informal, based on the practices of the organization over the years. Poor or adversarial industrial relations atmosphere can have serious implication for industrial systems and their structures, as organizations and their managers will find it hard to recover the cost that accrues from such depleting industrial relations atmosphere with a state of persistent industrial crises and ineffectiveness, the indicator of which is industrial disharmony, manifesting in rampant labour grievances, trade disputes and especially, incessant worker's strikes.

Industrial relations atmosphere, seem to have gained a broad acceptance for two major measures as expressed in (Ahiauzu, 1999; Yesufu, 1984, Zeb-Obipi, 2018) which are, adversarial industrial relations atmosphere and harmonious industrial relations atmosphere. It is suggested that a firm's industrial relations activities generate a characteristic atmosphere in the organization, which further activates the state of the general organizational industrial relations practice (Litwen and Stringer, 1968; Payne, 1971). The industrial relations atmosphere and system may be relatively be

crude with adversarial metrics, with one actor simply imposing his wish on the other through the use of force, because of the lack of rules; or on the other hand, it may be relatively subtle atmosphere that is harmonious in nature, embodying many levels of jointly agreed rules and various checks and balances of power.

Previous research scholars have indicated interest in investigating the harmonious industrial relations atmosphere due to its association with employee commitment at work (Oribabor, 2004; Venkata Ratnam, 2013). Presently, the need for an harmonious industrial relations atmosphere at work has heightened research interest in other constructs like, Workplace stressors (Atilola and Atilola, 2018); organizational internal communication Oribabor (2000); collective bargaining (Fashoyin, 1982, 2014) Each of these lines of enquiry has produced positive organizational outcomes

The adversarial industrial relations atmosphere context has also attracted more recent interest in the industrial relations atmosphere thesis. Recently, Yesufu (1984) in Oji and Amucheazi (2015) study, showed how the equilibrium of industrial relations is constantly disturbed in organizations. In the process, the satisfactions derivable from the work situation tend to become permanently elusive. More recent line of enquiry associated industrial relations atmosphere with a scope of negative outcomes. Zeb-Obipi, Obiekwe and Ateke (2019) reported in evidence the adverse association between industrial relations atmosphere and organizational resilience. Study findings show how possible it is for employees to be resilient when ever the industrial relations atmosphere seem adverse.

Early research has shown the influence of Industrial relations climate on job satisfaction and individual job performance (Freidlander and Margolies, 1969). Onasanya (2005) reviewed the predictors of good industrial relations atmosphere in organizations in Nigeria. Recently, Studies have shown the impact of industrial relations atmosphere on labour outputs in organizations (Nwaeke, 2017). More recently, some other studies have examined the actors that can determine the extent to which atmospheric/climatic stability can be assessed in industrial systems Dunlop (1958) in Onabanjo and Chidi, 2018; Dunlop (1958) in Tamunomiebi (2019). Yet another study have examined the impact of industrial relations environment on organizational resilience, with special interest on its implication on managers in Nigerian workplaces (Ahiauzu, 1999). Studies by Parker and Scott (1971), also shows the relationship between production variables, such as behaviours of parties and outside influence on industrial relations atmosphere. Lumley's (1980) show how the positive impact of workplace environment variable and employee attitude has on industrial relations atmosphere.

Research Hypothesis

The following hypotheses were examined in this study:

Ho₁: There is no significant relationship between progressive discipline and adversarial industrial relations atmosphere of electrical engineering companies in south-south, Nigeria.

Employment Relations Theory

Employment relation is the study of the regulation of the employment relationship between employer and employee, both collectively and individually, and the determination of substantive and procedural issues at industrial, organizational and workplace levels (Rose, 2008). According to Kaufman (2010), industrial relations is viewed as the process of rule making for the workplace (Dunlop, 1958); job regulation (Flanders, 1965); social regulation of production (Cox, 1971); the employment relationship as structured antagonism (Edwards, 2005); social regulation of market forces (Hyman, 1995); process of capitalist production and accumulation and the derived political and social class relations Caire (1996) as cited in Kaufman, 2010); conflict of interests and pluralist

forms of workplace governance (Kochan, 1998); class mobilization and social justice (Kelly, 1998); the advancement of efficiency, equity, and voice in the employment relationship (Budd, 2004); collective representation and social dialogue (European Industrial Relations Observatory, 2002). According to Bain and Clegg (1974), a traditional approach to employment and industrial relations has been to regard it as the study of the rules governing employment, and the ways in which the rules are changed, interpreted and administered.

These theoretical articulations by these theorists of reinforcement and interactional justice provides the foundation for an understanding of the status of the predictor variable (discipline) in the labour movement; while the theorist of employment relations provide the foundation for the status of the criterion variable (industrial relations atmosphere). Their formulations can in some way inspire us to develop models that can as well enrich the reservoir of knowledge and literature on this study on workplace discipline and industrial relations atmosphere or even related studies that fall within the circumference of industrial relations. A discussion around these three theories are crucial as they form the basis for increasing recognition of the concepts of the predictor variable and criterion, justifying the need for the state of discipline and industrial relations atmosphere at this point in time in our own circumstance. They also have the ability to help the researcher confront peculiar problems in the course of the implementation or management of workplace discipline. The study helps us see reasons for the isolation or differentiation of the peculiar parameters of the dimensions and measures of both variables in this study. We do therefore, resume discourse around relevant literature covering the study variables and guiding this study along this logic. The broad subject headings are: i) workplace discipline; ii) industrial relations atmosphere; iii) dimensions of work discipline; iv) measures of industrial relations atmosphere; v) nexus between workplace discipline and industrial relations atmosphere; vi) work rules.

Progressive Discipline

According to Jamodu (2012), progressive disciplinary procedures are actions against violators and non-conformist. It therefore emanates as a result of organizational member flagrant disobedience to what management frowns at in their rules and regulations or violating standards. As the name implies, it is meant to serve corrective purposes. They are a reactive measure that succeed the aftermath of deviant behavior the irresponsible behavior and helps to reduce. Amah (2010) is of the view that progressive disciplinary approach is the most popular approach among disciplinary procedures and it involves a system of corrective measures by increasing degrees. The penalty applied depends on the type of offence and the number of times a particular offence has been committed. Managers follow through the following processes, to get this done: i) unofficial oral warning for minor conduct, ii) first official written warning for repeated minor misconduct, iii) second and final official written warning with threat of temporary suspension, iv) transfer, demotion or temporary suspension and last chance notification for repeated minor misconduct, v) dismissal/termination for repeated minor misconduct viewed in another context.

Johnnie and Nwasike (2002) citing Sears *et al.* (1957) on their part view progressive discipline as one linked to the reform theory, which is widely regarded as a progressive and an enlightened view of punishment. According to them, even the available empirical evidence does not show a positive association between punishment and behaviour modification of the worker. In their assessment, the infliction of punishment may be permitted only when there is a chance that the employees will be punished, will be reformed or made better in the process. However, it is difficult to establish that workers are actually completely reformed when they are punished, or that punishment improves, or rewards and encourages employees for task well done. Peter (1966) rather sees it as a blame game and one of the most potent devices that bring estrangement rather than commitment.

Venkata Ratnam (2013) is of the view that through a system of appropriate training and education, multi-pronged and motivational strategies, proper allocation of job, the efficiency level of employees can be raised and their commitment to organizational goals enhanced. He stressed that the objective of the disciplinary process had created conditions whereby employees can voluntarily and willingly contribute their best to their organizational goals within the framework and norms of the organization. Progressive discipline is a discipline program, which progresses from the least severe to the most severe in terms of disciplinary actions/ penalties (Opatha, 2017). The system of progressive discipline come first place even before effective workplace discipline management can be said to have taken place in an organization.

The objective of progressive discipline as argued by Werther and Davis, (1989) is to give an opportunity to an offender to correct his or her behaviour before more severe penalties are inflicted. In other words, progressive disciplinary approach settles for stronger penalties as consequences for offences, which are repeated. Progressive discipline provides an opportunity to erring employees to remedy their future behaviours. According to Opatha (2017), progressive discipline is a good approach to employee discipline especially from human and industrial relations perspectives. Werther and Davis (1989) have advocated some strategic approach to solving disciplinary issues which he tagged "A typical Progressive Discipline program". Which starts with verbal warning, written warning with a record in personal file, one week suspension from work without pay, suspension for one month without pay, Demotion, and finally dismissal. This approach involves punitive discipline especially in terms of oral warning. Under progressive discipline, if the violation is done again after the informal talk and discipline meeting, written warning is suggested. To do this written warning, an interview called discipline interview will have to be held.

However, the argument by Louw, (2010) appear to be rooted in the and justified by an argument that for less serious forms of misconduct, the employer should follow progressive disciplinary sanctions that might range from verbal reprimands to final written warnings or suspension without pay. Furthermore, misconduct which is not serious enough to justify dismissal, for instance, lateness or absenteeism, may justify dismissal if the employee does not respond to a series of warnings. Following this argument also, Caisley (2008) remarked that, anytime employees have committed serious misconduct and there is evidence to that effect, they must be brought before a formal disciplinary inquiry. The procedure for running a formal inquiry should be observed throughout the process. Both substantive and procedural fairness must prevail from the start until the end of the process of discipline. Having dealt with the conventional approaches to workplace discipline, we shall now consider the nexus between workplace discipline dimensions and measures of industrial relations atmosphere.

Adversarial Industrial Relations Atmosphere

Adversarial industrial relations atmosphere is one measure of an industrial relations atmosphere. Deriving from the foregoing explanations and definition of industrial relations, an adversarial industrial relations atmosphere is encompassed by and repercussion leaves with it a crises state of persistent ineffectiveness of industrial relations, the indicator of which is industrial disharmony, manifesting in rampant labour grievances, trade disputes and especially, workers' strikes. According to Atilola (2011), this definition justifies the need and function of industrial relations as the practice that is geared towards the containment of industrial disharmony. It has been noted that the period of economic crises seemed to heighten the adversarial aspect of the industrial relation atmosphere (Adenugba & Omolawal, 2014). Deriving from the foregoing explanations and definition of industrial relations, industrial relation crisis which can be interpreted to mean adversarial industrial relations atmosphere, is a state of persistent ineffectiveness of industrial relations, the indicator of which is industrial disharmony, manifesting in rampant labour grievances, trade disputes and especially,

workers strikes. This definition is in cognizance of the fact that the essence and function of industrial relations practice is the containment of industrial disharmony.

It is possible to infer that a change in industrial relations climate is likely to be, at least in part due to changes in either structural outcomes or systemic outcome. According to Dastmalchian, (1986) it is possible to postulate that a situation of labour dependency is likely to be related to more positive organizational and industrial relations climates. It may also be possible to establish that some features of organization which have become regular outcomes of industrial relations such as employees' absenteeism, turn over intentions, grievances and disputes and work stoppages or strikes are the key issues that also make manifest an adversarial industrial relations atmosphere. It is argued particularly in Dastmalchian, Blyton & Adamson (1989) as cited in Likat, 1967; Payne & Pugh, 1976; Pugh & Payne 1977 studies on organizational climate that industrial relations climate acts as an intervening variable between the industrial relations inputs and outcomes. In perusing existing literature on adversarial industrial relations atmosphere, we see clearly the need for organizations and their managers to drastically mitigate the negative consequences that could manifest as repercussion or threat, that stem from either mismanagement of pending industrial relations issues in the work place or lack of proper management of industrial relations issues.

Ahiazu (2001) suggested some processes toward functional workplace industrial relations such as : i) there should be adequate knowledge by parties of the formal and informal rule-making methods which are adopted in the organization; ii) the grievance ventilation, dispute , redundancy and disciplinary procedures should be well articulated and communicated to all members of the organization; iii) the exercise of power, authority and control by both management and labour organizations, should be done responsibly, and definitely not with flagrant disregard of human feelings and likely consequences of the affected member's perception of actions; iv) conflict should be functionally managed by both parties in the industrial relations arena; v) there should be established mechanism for prompt and effective communication between management and workers on matters that affect either parties. Recent studies have however presented that these processes have suddenly gone extinct in most organizations of which the case of Nigeria is not different. Our next line of discourse therefore examines literature on some choice parameters that make up the adversarial industrial relations atmosphere such as: regular conflict, strike actions, discontents and rampant collective grievance in the workplace.

Research Design

This study adopted is a cross-sectional research design.

Population of the Study

The population of the study was made up of 225 staff of 10 Electrical Engineering companies who are registered with the Manufacturers Association of Nigeria (MAN) in south-south Nigeria. The population excludes casual workers who are not listed in the nominal roll of the firms or updated gazetted publications of the said firms. The population was restricted to only Electrical Engineering companies in the organized private sector to ease accessibility. The study therefore adopted the 2019 directory of the manufacturers Association of Nigeria (M A N) which is the latest version available.

Sample Size and Sampling Procedure

The simple random sampling method was also adopted to arrive at the study subjects. This is a good and fair representation of the 225 employees that have been identified as our population.

Methods of Data Analyses

The data generated through the quantitative instrument was first of all cleaned after which the items were coded and entered into the data editor of the SPSS. Frequencies, as well as descriptive such as the measures of central tendency (i.e. mean scores) and dispersion (i.e. standard deviation) were computed for the primary analysis, which focused on the study demographics and univariate analysis respectively. At the secondary level of analysis, inferential statistics such as Pearson r correlation coefficients and Regression coefficients including the p-values were calculated for purposes of answering the research questions and testing the research hypotheses. Correlation analyses using the Pearson r correlation were interpreted based on Guilford's (1956) scale giving in Irving (2005, p.16), thus: (a) $< .20$ = slight correlation, almost negligible; (b) $.20$ to $.40$ = low correlation, definite but small relationship; (c) $.40$ to $.70$ = moderate correlation, substantial relationship; $.70$ to $.90$ = high correlation, marked relationship; and (e) $< .90$ = very high correlation, very dependable relationship. According to (Irving 2005, p.16) the Guilford scale provides "a consistent means for interpreting the statistical correlations" and these interpretations should be evaluated in the light of the significance levels, which is set at p value of < 0.05 (one tailed). Kerlinger and Lee (2000) according to (Irving 2005, p.16) give guidelines for accepting or rejecting the null hypotheses as follows: (1) an r value of $< .20$ is the benchmark for accepting the null hypotheses.

Progressive discipline and measure of industrial relation atmosphere

		Progressive Discipline	Adversarial Industrial Relation Atmosphere	
Progressive Discipline	Pearson Correlation	1	-.362**	.459**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000
	N	131	131	131
	Pearson Correlation	-.362**	1	-.283**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.001
	N	131	131	131
Harmonious Industrial Relation Atmosphere	Pearson Correlation	.459**	-.283**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.001	
	N	131	131	131

Source: SPSS Data Output, 2020

In addressing research question 5, the result on relationship between progressive discipline and adversarial industrial relations atmosphere becomes the focus. Based on the data presented on table 4.17 above, where $R = -0.362$ and $Pv = 0.000$, which is < 0.05 , the results indicate that there is low and inverse correlation between progressive discipline and adversarial industrial relations atmosphere. Again, this indicates that the relationship between both are definite but small. That is to say that the more progressive discipline that is applied the less adversarial industrial relation atmosphere will become. It is on this premise that we reject the null hypothesis of $p = 0.000$

The test for the relationship between progressive discipline and the measures of industrial relation atmosphere was reflected in two hypothetical statements:

H_{01} : There is no significant relationship between progressive discipline and adversarial industrial relations atmosphere in electrical engineering companies south-south, Nigeria.

Table above on progressive discipline and adversarial industrial relations atmosphere showed that the probability value (p) = 0.000 which is < 0.05 , hence from the decision rule, null hypothesis is rejected, indicating that there is a significant relationship between progressive discipline and

adversarial industrial relations atmosphere. This shows that progressive discipline used organization, has a significant and positive influence on adversarial industrial relations atmosphere.

CONCLUSION

1. As electrical engineering companies apply progressive disciplinary mechanism, adversarial industrial relations atmosphere is significantly decreased.
2. As electrical engineering companies apply progressive disciplinary mechanism, harmonious industrial relations atmosphere is significantly increased.
3. Industrial relations atmosphere does not increase proportionately to the degree of progressive discipline in electrical engineering companies in south south region, Nigeria.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the implications arising from the study outcomes, the following recommendations are made:

1. Managers should ensure the changing of assignment of offenders. This way they can be able to encourage organizational members to develop appropriate behaviours that will impact on the industrial relations atmosphere positively. When organizational members feel relaxed, they will enjoy their work and this will reduce the incidences of lateness to work, absenteeism and other unhealthy behaviour patterns that are associated with lack of emotive and normative commitment. This is because organizational members will see that they are valued based on who they are as individual organizational members rather than for economic exchange reasons.
2. Efforts should be made by organizations and their managers in electrical engineering firms to apply progressive disciplinary techniques in a way that they first describe the actions taken against violators of work rules and ensuring that they follow the disciplinary procedures consistently without bias. Emphasis should be placed on workrules and discipline, instead of punishment to strengthen bonds of relationship among organizational members and their managers. Offending organizational members should therefore be warned verbally.
3. Then through written warning if violators fail to comply.

REFERENCES

- Ahiauza, A. I. (1999). *The African Industrial Man*. Port Harcourt, Nigeria: CIMRAT.
- Amah, E. (2010). *Human Resource Management*. Port Harcourt, Nigeria: Amathyst & Colleagues Publishers.
- Atilola, B. (2011). *Themes in trade union law and Administration in Nigeria*. Lagos: Hybrid Consult Legal Research, Publishing, Training and Consultancy.
- Dastmalchian, A., Blyton, P., and Adamson, R. (1989). Industrial Relations Climate: Testing a construct. *Journal Occupational Psychology*. 6(2), 21-32.
- Fashoyin, T. (1992). *Industrial relations in Nigeria: Development and practice* 2nd ed. Ikeja Longman Nig. Ltd.
- Flanders, A. (1968). *Management and Unions*. London: Farber and Farber.
- Hyman, R. (1975). *Industrial Relations: A Marxist Introduction*. London: Macmillan.

- Johnnie, P.B. and Nwasike, J.N. (2002). *Organizational Behaviour and Advanced Management Thought*. Lagos: University of Lagos Press.
- Lumley, R. (1980). A modified rules approach to workplace industrial relations. *Industrial Relations Journal*, 10(4), 249-256.
- Nwaeke, L. I. (2017). Social Challenges of Industrial Relation: A Study of Oil Producing Companies in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria. *Journal of Economics and Sustainable Development*. 8(3), 92-98.
- Opatha, H. H. D. N. P. & Mithani, D. M. (2017). "Towards Effective Employee Discipline Administration; Some Reflections". *NMIMS Management Review* 12(2) July-December 95.
- Oribabor, P.E. (2004). *Effective communication: A tool for successful management*. In Oribabor, P.E. and Ogunbanjo O.A. Ed. *Introduction to industrial sociology*. Ile-Ife:)A.U. press Ltd.
- Tamunomiebi, M. D. (2019). *Approach to Industrial Relations*. Port Harcourt: African Journal of Professional Research and Information Ltd.
- Yesufu, T. M. (1984). *The dynamics of Industrial Relations :The Nigerian Experience*. Lagos: University Press Ltd. Publishers.
- Zeb-Obipi, I. (2018). Framework of Industrial Relations Analysis: A Re-visit to Industrial Relations Theory. *International Journal of Human Resources Management (IJHRM)*, 7(1), 1-12.