

## **IMPACT OF INDUSTRIAL DISPUTE MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES ON WORKPLACE HARMONY: A THEORETICAL REVIEW**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*A properly managed dispute is expected to bring about increase productivity, as well as achieving the goals for the business. This study theoretically investigated the relationship between industrial dispute management strategies and workplace harmony. The study literature review offers a combination of the past and contemporary studies about on the meaning and nature of all the study variables of study, and discovered that no organization irrespective of the kind of business they are in can progress effectively without giving room for constructive dispute to thrive while managing the destructive aspects using appropriate strategies such as avoidance and accommodation strategies. The study laid its background on the social network theory and the social exchange theory. Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusion and recommendations are made; the study concluded that achievement of workplace harmony will enhance achievement of organizational mission and vision. Therefore, the following recommendations were made among others that industrial management should try as much as possible to discourage destructive conflict while promoting constructive conflict.*

**Key word: Industrial Dispute management strategies, accommodation, avoidance, work-place harmony, teamwork, communication, theories.**

### **INTRODUCTION**

There is a belief that as to what a dispute stands for and it is interpreted as destructive, wicked, injurious, avoidable, and irrational. Hence, it can also cause, delay in productions as the work place become unsecured and unsafe for the employees. However, when dispute is perceived at the workplace, it should be evaded, and managers should do everything for its to put an end to it. For the purpose of this study, dispute would be used interchangeably with conflicts in some cases. Corwin (1969) as quoted in Munirate (2018) conceptualized conflict as a form of interpersonal or intergroup actions which violates the norms of cooperation at the work-place. Furthermore, conflict is seen as the process which begins when one party perceives that another has frustrated, or is about to frustrate, some concern of his (Thomas (1992); as quoted by Munirate, 2018). These definitions have a common theme revolving around identification of elements that trigger and propagate conflict. Conflict/dispute has been perceived differently by different scholars, indicating that the single phenomena of conflict can be given different subjective interpretations. Some perceive it as a reflection of interpersonal hostility, while others regard it as an interpersonal disagreement stemming out of different choices or preferences (Barki et al., 2001 in Bob-Fubara, 2020). Conflict at the workplace has been a profound area of interest for management as well as research scholars (Litterer, 1996; Pandy, 1992; Munirat et al. 2018). Conflict is not necessarily related to the differences in the perception of ends, it can also occur when people share the same perception of goals with disagreement related to means. Jehn (1997) as quoted in Munirate et al., (2018) postulated that this may not be the case in every situation as conflict is likely to arise out of the disagreement related to means of managing work. The classification of conflict based on means versus ends is one of the commonly used approaches to encapsulate the phenomenon; however, other antecedents of dispute also need to be taken into consideration. The individuals or groups are incompatible, thus the work requirements propel them to coordinate with each other, illustrating the presence of interdependence. Nevertheless, the incompatibility due to personal, emotional or social reasons results in frequent recurrence of conflict. Recent researchers have also

explored this notion, identifying the presence of conflict as a result of personal and environmental influences on the group members (Almost, Doran, McGillisand Spence, 2010).

Okere (2013) regards organizational or industrial dispute into groups such as;

- i. Differences among employees. That is dispute between an employee and employee. In some cases, team members hold different opinions about the means of performing the allocated tasks. It becomes difficult to identify which viewpoint is the most suitable one under the circumstances as the task conflict may escalate into affective one due to inclusion of negative emotions.
- ii. Between employers and employees, this is connected with the employment or non-employment of the terms of employment or with conditions of work of any person. Thus, this kind dispute is related to the organizational processes, where employees may experience disagreement in terms of the ways in which specific organizational tasks can be performed. It has also been observed that, the availability of varied perspectives helps the workplace teams to offer better productivity as the knowledge of different employees is assimilated to perform the allocated tasks (Włodarczyk, 2010).

Conflict management at work-place helps in providing a platform in which the aggrieved members at the work-place come together through a collective bargaining approach in order to reduce the dysfunctions of conflict so as to improve learning and efficiency at the work-place, (Rahim, 2002; Wobodo, 2019). It is therefore, vital to state that if there are any disputes between employees and the organizational management; this will not only have an adverse effect on the industrial relations system, but the whole system of the entire society at large. It then encourages the power of the union to enter contract with management to determine the terms and conditions of service of its members as well as establish the procedure for handling disputes.

In this dynamic world like ours, organizations are adapting to recent techniques in the business environment to meet up what other rival's companies are doing. Most organizations in the globe and in Nigeria particularly, today are known for their long hour culture at work-place and high work load on employees. Okuogbo, (2004) pointed out some issues affecting the work-place ranging from issues of insecurity, poorly designed workstation, excessive noise, oil spillage, insufficient safety measures, poor personnel protective equipment and other emergencies equipment. Workers under such working condition(s) are likely to contract occupational disease that will or had shortened the life span of an employee and other stakeholders. This singular act of organization generate dispute among its stakeholders that can affect organization performance. This dispute may take the form of strike, go-slow, token strikes, sympathetic strikes, pen-down strikes, hunger strikes, and lockouts (Okere, 2013). Thus, the aforementioned problem(s) lead to slow or stoppage of production, lost of job, national economy issue, recession, depression to criminality then to civil war. It is against these problems that, this study theoretically evaluates the effect of industrial dispute management strategies on work-place harmony.

Establish the extent to which dispute management strategies impacts on workplace harmony.

## **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

### **Baseline Theory**

A theoretical foundation is a lens from which all knowledge is constructed either metaphorically or literally for a research study. It serves as a structure and support for the study. They were as follows;

#### **The social exchange theory;**

Social exchange theory holds that human behaviour and social interaction is basically an exchange of both tangible and intangible activities, (Homans, 1961 in Ahiauzu et al, 2016). Human relationships are based upon the exchange of value between two or more parties, the social exchange theory views interpersonal interactions from a cost-benefit perspective, much related to an economic exchange except that a social exchange deals with the exchange of intangible social

costs and benefits and is not governed by explicit rules or agreements. At the intangible level, carrying on a conversation with someone costs, time and energy but can be offset by the rewards gained such as confirmation of your value and development of a relationship. Notes social exchange involves two persons, each of who provides some benefits to the other, and contingent upon rewards from the other.

### **Social Network Theory**

Faulkner et al. (2001) in Ahiauzu et al. (2016) Social Network Theory views as persistent and structured sets of autonomous players (persons or organizations) who cooperate on the basis of implicit and open ended contracts. The network can also be used to determine the social capital of individual actors. Social network theory produces an alternate view, where the attributes of individuals are less important than their relationships and ties with other actors within the network. Social networks have many benefits which include knowledge sharing, improved feedback/service and improved market and sales. The Social Network Theory is therefore suited to study for gathering information from customers, analyzing customer information, and responding to customers faster can lead to customer satisfaction, repeat customers and current customers referring new customers.

### **Concept of Industrial Dispute Management Strategies**

Modern organization has not been an unmixed blessing; it has created a yawning gulf between management and its employees because of the absence of employee's ownership of the means of production (Okere, 2013). The term dispute has been defined variously by social scientists and there is no dearth for definitions. Robbins (2006) as quoted in Abioro, et al, (2019), regards as a process when one party perceives that another party has negatively affected, or is about to negatively affect, something that the first party cares about. Furthermore, Schermerhorn, (2005), pointed out that dispute appears in a social situation as any disagreement over issues of substance or emotional enmity that create friction between individuals or groups. Hence, conflicts can be encountered in different forms in organizations – intrapersonal (within individual) level, interpersonal (two or more individuals) level, inter group (between groups/stakeholders in organizations) level and inter organizational level inter organizational (conflict between organizations). Burton, (1998) in Abioro, et al, (2019), described conflict management as that key process that provides an avenue for the aggrieved members of the organization to properly manage the source of the dispute before it is escalated. Thus, dispute management refers to the tactics of containing dispute, together with finding a lasting solution to resolving it.

Since dispute is a part and parcel of human life and is inevitable in work organizations, this needs some strategies to manage it. Jones et al, (2003), pointed out some industrial dispute management strategies that could be focused on the entire organization. These include; changing organization's culture/structure, and altering the source of the conflict. Industrial dispute management strategies as what organizational managers can adopt to ensure that conflicts are well managed in a functional manner on the individual members of the organization and the organization at large, (Munirat et al, 2018). Hence, industrial dispute management strategies that could be focused on individual members of the organization include, increasing awareness of the sources of conflict, increasing diversity awareness and skills, practicing job rotation, using permanent transfers or dismissal when necessary.

The process of managing dispute is to achieve constructive rather than destructive results as clearly essential to organizational success. This process of conflict management can be pursued in a variety of ways. A properly managed organizational dispute is expected to bring about institutional benefit, increase productivity, competitive advantage and above all effective attainments as well as achieving the set goals and objectives for the business (Abioro, et al., 2019). Adopting Robbins, (2006), which suggested a broader classification viz., competing strategy,

collaborating strategy, compromising strategy, avoiding strategy and Accommodating strategy. For the purpose of this paper, only two of this will be considered, and are as follows:

### **Dimension of Industrial Dispute Management Strategies**

#### **Accommodating**

The accommodating strategy essentially entails giving the opposing side what it wants. The use of accommodation often occurs when one of the parties wishes to keep the peace or perceives the issue as minor. Robbins et al, (2007) define integrating with some phrases which are 'open and honest discussion', intensive listening', to understand differences' and ,mutual agreement'. The integrating is suitable when there is a complex problem or one part can't solve this problem on its own and two opposing parts try to achieve a common solution by exchanging ideas, knowledge, suggestion choices (Rahim, 2002; Wobodo, 2019). The primary aim of this strategy is to meet the needs of two parts, thus satisfaction of both sides can be provided. Moreover, when making a decision is emergent and agreement and solution is valuable for both parts, it is appropriate (Robbins et al, 2007).

#### **Avoidance**

The basic goal of the avoidance is to delay or postponing the evil days to come, this because dispute is inevitable. Avoiding strategy may help to maintain relationship that would be hurt by dispute resolution and very effective way to affront conflictive situations at short term. Disadvantage may be dispute remain unresolved, overuse of the style leads to others walking all over them. Appropriate time to use this style when stakes are not high or issues is trivial, when confrontation will hurt a working relationship, when there is little chance of satisfying your wants, when disruption outweighs the benefit of conflict resolution, when gathering information is more important than an immediate decision, when others can more effectively resolve the conflict and when time constraints demand a delay. In avoiding, one part sometimes thinks that conflict is bad, unnecessary or harmful for its own, so this part avoids coming into conflict (Certo, 1997). The reaction of the one part may be to withdraw when it realizes the conflict. This part shows indifference or behaves as if the conflict isn't important and it hides its idea (Robbins, 1991). Avoiding is appropriate when conflict is not important for one part which does not have to make a decision (Certo, 1997; Rahim, 2002). In addition, the issue does not affect this part very much. However, this strategy is inappropriate when one part which has to decide about this issue, avoids discussion and conflict is not important for one part.

#### **Concept of Workplace Harmony**

Management and employees working harmoniously in order to achieve the stated organizational goals and objectives. Interestingly, the workplace of today is characterized by two major actors, the management and the workers. Otobo (2005) confirms that the harmony of the major actors plays a significant role in the life of any business venture because it encompasses joint consultation, co-ownership, co-operation and co-determination. To buttress this statement, Chinedu et al, (2018) connotes that, the harmony of this major actors brings about an employee having a sense of belonging in the running of affairs of the organization and taking responsibility which can as well lead to a peaceful working environment. Workplace harmony seems to be affected by this development that the frequency of management-workforce disputes is fast raising in many sectors of world economies. The Nigeria work-place context had for decades been embattled in the demands for increased wage and earnings, bonuses, awards, health and safety packages as means of incentive, etc. which form the components of financial motivation. In spite of these provisions, there is still manifest disaffection between employees on one strand and between employers and employees on the other. Organizational amicability alludes to a situation of peace in relative sense in any industrial organization, which includes; nonappearance of strikes, and doubt among work gatherings or unions, peaceful relationship amongst unions and

administration of the organization, and additionally representative positive view of their commitment as member not as subject inside the organization. Work-place harmony is an exceptionally basic element of organizational profitability and execution. Furthermore, Puttapalli, et al. (2012) defined industrial harmony as being concerned with the mutual relationship between management team and employees in relation to the terms and conditions of employment at the workplace. It is a situation where there is healthy and cooperative working relationship between employers and employees. And as such, implies that whenever these mutual expectations are breached by either parties, industrial relations tend to be strained, ending up in industrial disharmony; and consequently, manifests in the form of open hostility, distrust, disrespect, noncooperation and avoidance of interaction (Hatch et al, 2013; Wobodo, 2019). However, in order to mitigate or probably avert this scenario. Akpoyovwaire (2013) contends that people at the helm of affairs (management) must have the prerequisite knowledge and authority to execute their responsibilities objectively without favour; they must ensure that the task structure of each employee group is properly defined in such a way that it leaves no room for role ambiguity; that employers of labour should synergize with trade union representatives in the development of effective procedures for negotiation of terms and conditions of employment and for settlement of disputes. When all this achieved in the organization it brings about teamwork and proper communication system among stakeholders that enhance productivity.

### **Teamwork**

Human beings have experience throughout their social history, lived, loved, grow younger to older and worked together in groups (West, 2012 in Farhat 2015). The mutual understanding of living and functioning together creates connection among people, society and families. The term team can be defined as in the human society to live, to work, to play and to cooperate with one another for particular task (Farhat, 2015). When work is done cooperatively as a team it can achieve extremely extra work than individually. Teamwork is an essential part of work-place success. Employers look for people who not only know how to work well with others, but who also understand that not every player on the team can or will be the one who gets the organizational goals. When everyone at the work-place works together to accomplish goals, everyone achieves more.

### **Communication**

In today's highly technological society where everyone can do and access everything from their computer or cellphone, the importance of effective communication cannot be over stressed. Mojaye et al, (2015) examined a study on the influence of communication on Industrial Harmony in the Civil Service of Delta State Nigeria. The finding showed that while effective communication may not necessarily lead to good industrial relations but it may engender industrial peace.

Using the proper mode of communication in various situations will make everything flow easier, and help make employees feel that they are important and valued member in the organization. Effective team building involves clarity about the priority of team member's tasks with an established method for the teams for feedback. Feedbacks must however be received with dignity bearing in mind that people hesitate to give feedback to others out of fear of hurting them or having to deal with defensive or justifying behaviour. To obtain feedback there should be openness to feedback. The reliability of the feedback should be determined by checking with others at the work-place. There should be important business information regularly with team members communicating clearly and honestly with each other and bringing diverse opinions to the table.

In also, listening is probably the most glossed over, yet most important piece of the of communication puzzle. Without the listening portion, any other piece cannot fully succeed. Employees and colleagues need to know that their input is being heard. Feeling unheard can often be the cause of low morale and high employee turnover. While listening does not necessarily mean incorporating each suggestion into your company or changing every policy based on what one

employee says, it does mean giving the ideas full consideration. Hence, communication is best understood through the process of sender - receiver – feedback.

### **Industrial Dispute Management Strategies and Work-place Harmony**

Munirat et al, (2018), examined the organization conflict and industrial harmony: a synthesis of literature. The objective is to synthesis the relationship between conflict management and industrial harmony. The study used qualitative and descriptive design to deduce its conclusion. The study concluded that for industrial harmony to be achieved, organizations need to consider accommodation strategy as a tool.

Nwokocha, (2018), examined the role of employers in enhancing industrial harmony in organizations in Nigeria. The work posits that conflict is inevitable in all organizations and as such, the employer who has the responsibility of making major policies in the organization and to achieve corporate objectives must play a dominant role in ensuring industrial harmony. The study reveal some of the factors that undermine industrial harmony and productivity in private sector to include leadership behaviour, lack of effectives communication, work environment, poor labour management policies, dehumanization of work environment and non-recognition of trade union as a bargaining party.

Mayowa, (2015), examined industrial conflict and its management strategies in selected manufacturing companies in Lagos State, Nigeria. The study utilized co-relational survey method which involves the use of structured questionnaire and personal observation to elicit information from the respondents. The findings revealed that the causes of conflict in manufacturing companies in Lagos State, Nigeria include poor means of communicating grievances to top managers, unfavourable economic and industrial policies, poor employee compensation and welfare among others. Therefore, this study concluded that managers should combine avoidance should be one of the strategy when dealing with industrial conflict to maintain cordial and productive labour-management relationship.

Nwokocha (2015) conducted a conceptual study on the title Employers and the Enhancement of Industrial Harmony in Private Sector Organizations in Nigeria. The study examines the role of employers in enhancing industrial harmony in organizations with a focus on private sector organizations in Nigeria. The paper posits that conflict is inevitable in all organizations and, as such, the employer who has the responsibility of making major organizational policies to achieve corporate objectives must play a dominant role in ensuring industrial harmony. The paper exposes some of the factors that undermine industrial harmony and productivity in private sector to include leadership behaviour, lack of effective communication, work environment, and non-recognition of trade union as a bargaining party. It further explicates that productivity and growth are not fully enhanced because of management practice of exclusionism, poor labour-management policies, and dehumanization of work environment.

Nkiinebari, (2015) examined employee engagement and workplace harmony in Nigeria Civil Service. The study attempted to examine the extent to which employee engagement as a non-financial incentive can significantly influence the degree of workplace harmony in the Nigeria civil service. Findings revealed a significant relationship and influence of the variables of employee engagement on workplace harmony in the studied sector. The results culminated into our condition that employee engagement is a critical non-financial incentive that has significant relationship on workplace harmony.

### **CONCLUSION**

Organizations will always want to design their strategies to ensure effective application of dispute management strategies that will enhance work-place harmony in order to achieve their mission and vision. There are important indications from the findings of this study. Despite the relationship between industrial dispute management and work-place harmony, it was found that industrial dispute management practices by organization has led to a reduced level to dispute, work

stoppages, and strikes among others which may have negative effect on the achievement of the organizational objectives; effective communication leads to productive; teamwork increase productive. Thus, it is concluded that industrial dispute management strategy affect work-place peace. Although, everyone's demand is being paid attention to either on the basis of avoidance or accommodation depending on the nature of the conflict. Based on the findings of this research study, the following recommendations were made.

- That management of companies should try as much as possible to discourage destructive conflict while promoting constructive conflict.
- That in the event of any conflict situation, management should be responsive enough to apprehend it objectively with appropriate strategies such as accommodation to avoid turning the organization to a breeding ground for various deviant workplace behaviour like, strike and alienations as result of disharmony.
- Management of organization should reward and encourage employee who go extra miles for the success of the organization, thereby, increasing conflict avoidance in the organization.

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