

GRIEVANCE MANAGEMENT STRATEGY AND MINIMIZATION OF INDUSTRIAL ACTIONS IN PLASTIC MANUFACTURING FIRMS IN PORT HARCOURT

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between grievance management strategy and minimization of industrial actions in plastic manufacturing firms in Port Harcourt. The explanatory survey research design was used for the study. 47 managers from 10 paint manufacturing firms were engaged. The questionnaire was the instrument was adopted. The Spearman Rank order correlation was used for test of hypotheses. 39 were validly used for the study. Finding revealed that there is a significant relationship between grievance management strategy and minimization of industrial actions (picketing and work-to-rule) in plastic manufacturing firms in Port Harcourt. The study concluded that handling employee grievances is important if industrial actions are to be minimized. The study recommended that plastic manufacturing firms in Port Harcourt should endeavour to make open door policy a culture in the organization where employees and management can dialogue to reduce picketing; plastic manufacturing firms should ensure that management and employee have one-in-one interaction usually on weekly or monthly basis so as to hear their grievances and make way for harmonious work environment to prevail, thus minimizing work-to-rule in the organization.

Keywords: *Grievance management strategy, open door policy, picketing and work-to-rule.*

INTRODUCTION

Today, the need to maintain a harmonious relationship in the workplace in order to boost employee morale, enhance organizational effectiveness, and improve organizational productivity has made the management of employee grievance a serious and vital organizational concern. Employee grievance management has emerged as a top priority for many right thinking managers and managements in our contemporary business arena, as organizations seeking to get the best out of every of its employees must have the capacity to maintain a harmonious management-labour relationship which is vital for organizational survival, success, effectiveness, and improved performance. The importance of effective employee grievance management has made organizations to begin to restructure their operating procedures to accommodate their employee's feelings, opinions and views in order to gain the employees trust, loyalty and whole hearted commitment, especially when it comes to employees having channels to express their grievances to the management.

Grievance refers to any genuine or imaginary feeling of dissatisfaction or injustice which an employee or group of employees experiences about the job and its nature, about the management policies and procedures which are expressed by the employee and brought to the notice of the management and the organization (Juneja, 2018). Due to various changes taken place in organizations, and also because of differences in the ways people behaves and perceive thing, there are chances that complaints and disputes must exist at workplaces which brings about employee grievances. Employee grievance therefore represents a feeling of dissatisfaction or discontent on the part of a worker resulting from the actions or decision of supervisors or top management. Jones and Gorge (2010) posit that disagreements are always an inevitable part of organizational life. However, management always put in place some processes and procedures which can be followed to ensure that every of such conflicts and grievance are resolved. Different

organizations settle grievances between employees in different ways. Even different scholars have identified different grievance management strategies. But this work identifies and adopts open door policy as measure of grievance management strategy

The policy of open door as the first dimension of grievance management strategies involves the aggrieved employee meeting the top managers of the business and physically addresses his or her grievances. Bamberger et al. (2018) opine that the above policy is most practical in small corporations. On the other hand, top management of bigger organizations is normally busy with further concerns of the company. Additionally, open door policy is perceived to be suitable for executives. Employees can take their workplace concerns, questions, or suggestions outside their own chain of command without worrying. Companies are expected to adopt an open door policy to develop employee trust and to make sure important information and feedback reach managers who can use it to make changes and improvements.

Industrial action is a work stoppage caused by the mass refusal of employees to work. Industrial action usually takes place in response to employee grievances (Nwaogu, 2012). Industrial actions are sometimes used to pressure governments, business owners, employers and human resource managers to intervene among workers of an organization (Eric & Urho, 2015). On the other hand, minimization of industrial actions means the elimination or reduction of grievances, strike and complaints among a workforce. In order to curtail the menace of industrial actions in organizations, management must take cognizance of the aforementioned, as formulation and implementation that policies to judiciously correct these maladies would minimize industrial action existence in workplaces. This work measures minimization of industrial action as minimization of picketing and minimization of work-to-rule..

Picketing is a form of protest in which people (called pickets or picketers) congregate outside a place of work or location where an event is taking place. Picketers normally endeavor to be non-violent. It can have a number of aims, but is generally to put pressure on the party targeted to meet particular demands or cease operations (Kelvin, 2017). Minimization of picketing denotes the reduction of picketing among a worker or group of workers protest. Here, employees are less concern on the option to incite protest through the form of picketing. Minimization of work-to-rule as the second measure is the reduction of an industrial action where, workers stay on their jobs and significantly fasten up the operations by assiduous adherence to a wider interpretation of work rules as may be encrypted in the collective bargaining agreement. Nevertheless, employees' grievances are sacrosanct to the detriment of organization's actualizations, thus need to be minimize at all due course through the enshrinement of mechanisms such as prompt address system, prompt payment of salaries and accrued benefits to employees, and other things to mention just a few.

Statement of Problem

Disagreement is one common phenomenon anywhere humans are assembled to carry out tasks and responsibilities even in business organizations. This most times brings conflicts, grievances among employees that need to be addressed so it doesn't lead to industrial action. In reality, the researcher has observed that many managers have not identified and embraced open door policy to allow employees to express their concern to managers and senior staff. This has made employees run into their shell and usually consider industrial actions like picketing and work-to-rule as means to express themselves. Another issue that necessitated this study is the lack of empirical studies to support the explanation that grievance management strategy affects minimization of industrial actions (Owoseni, 2014; Dupe, 2015; Eric & Urho, 2015). It is therefore pertinent to fill the gap in literature by examining the relationship that exists between grievance management strategy and minimization of industrial actions in plastic manufacturing Firm in Port Harcourt.

Hypotheses

- Ho₁: There is no significant relationship between open door policy and minimization of picketing of plastic manufacturing firms in Port Harcourt.
- Ho₂: There is no significant relationship between open door policy and minimization of work-to-rule of plastic manufacturing firms in Port Harcourt.

Concept of Grievance Management Strategy

Arvey and Jones (2015) see grievance management strategy as processes through which an employee can bring workplace concerns to upper levels of management. In other words, grievance management strategy refers to mechanisms of upward communication adopted by industrial organizations for the purpose of bringing workers grievance to the surface for handling. These definitions entails that a well formulated grievances management strategy can enhance positive organizational outcomes and contribute to the effectiveness of management, as well as creation of a harmonious management-labour relations.

Grievance handling is the management of employee dissatisfaction or complaints (e.g. favouritism, workplace harassment, or wage cuts). By establishing formal grievance handling procedures, you provide a safe environment for your employees to raise their concerns. You also create a channel to explain your policies and rationale for actions or decisions (Walker & Hamilton,, 2011). As an employer, you'll need to understand why it's important to have a structured grievance process and how this will not only benefit your company but your employees too. Having a reasonable grievance procedure in the workplace can encourage a thorough, speedy, and satisfactory resolution to any issues highlighted by an employee in the first instance, helping to avoid lengthy and costly potential tribunals. It should also help to protect the employee from receiving further punishment on appeal, promoting a healthy grievance culture so other individuals can understand the process, should they consider pursuing formal proceedings in future. In the light of the above, we looked into open door policy as a grievance management strategy.

Open door Policy: The policy of open door involves the aggrieved employee meeting the top managers of the business and physically addresses his or her grievances. Bamberger et al. (2018) opine that the above policy is most practical in small corporations. On the other hand, top management of bigger organizations is normally busy with further concerns of the company. Additionally, open door policy is perceived to be suitable for executives. Cristina and Aure (2011) maintains an "Open Door Policy" means that should an employee wish to discuss a matter with his or her supervisor, site administrator, principal, director, vice-presidents, executive vice-president, president/CEO or human resources, the employee can request and will generally be granted a meeting. The purpose of the Open door policy is to encourage communication and is not meant to circumvent the chain of command or the formal grievance procedure. Rather, it is to be used if an employee does not feel comfortable in bringing a particular issue using the formal grievance mechanism (Cristina & Aure, 2011). If an employee struggles with their manager, an open door policy may allow them to speak with a more senior employee about the issue. This will help in solving the issue between both parties. An open door policy means every manager's door is open to every employee. Companies adopt an open door policy to develop employee trust and to make sure important information and feedback reach managers who can use it to make changes and improvements. An open door policy is normally communicated in the employee handbook which both employees and managers are expected to be acquainted with in order to know what to do at each given time.

Concept of Minimization of Industrial Actions

Industrial action are actions taken by employees of a company against bad working conditions or low pay and to increase bargaining power with the employer and intend to force the employer to improve them by reducing productivity in a workplace. However, minimization of industrial actions

means the elimination or reduction of grievances, strike and complaints among a workforce. To the industrial democrat, minimization of industrial actions speaks to the activity of employees' satisfaction on cooperation thus eliminating the move for strike in the workplace. Circumstances which seem to negate industrial action mostly stem from delay in the payment of salary, unconstitutional suspension or expulsion of an employee, sexual harassment, brawny harassment such as slapping, beating, pushing, etc. All these debilitate cooperation between management and employees as they are hostile to workplace harmony. Workers have the sole right especially when guided by the constitution and labour laws to inject industrial action in their workplaces, where they are dissatisfied with a given circumstance. However, this work measures minimization of industrial action as minimization of picketing, and minimization of work-to-rule.

Minimization of Picketing: This denotes the reduction of picketing among a worker or group of workers protest. Here, employees are less concern on the option to incite protest through the form of picketing. Minimization of picketing portrays that in a given situation where picketing is enforced, picketers are usually in few numbers. Patently, picketing is difficult to decimated in an organization, but can be minimized through effectual measures enshrine in the system to address strikes and conflicts in the organizational setting. Grievances among organizational stakeholders should be promptly addressed to promote organizational reputation and less picketing as the case may be. This will boom togetherness workers in the organizational setting, thus enhancing harmony for the organizational growth and development, astronomically.

Minimization of work-to-rule: Minimization of work-to-rule is reduction of an industrial action where, workers stay on their jobs and significantly fasten up the operations by assiduous adherence to a wider interpretation of work rules as may be encrypted in the collective bargaining agreement. Here, employees do more than the minimum required by the rules of their bond, and specifically pursue all safety or other regulations, thus increase their performance, as their works are geared towards extended hours and weekends beyond limit. In this wise, employees are enthused to work overtime as they prioritize the organization's attainments before theirs. In this stance, employees see themselves and their task and responsibilities as one. They are poisoned to work for the success of the organization. They are keen to ensuring the organizations' aspirations were drive and materialized by their brawny and brainy efforts. They show companymanship in the course of executing their tasks, assignments and responsibilities. Developing the human capital is very important if we must live in a world of minimal insecurity.

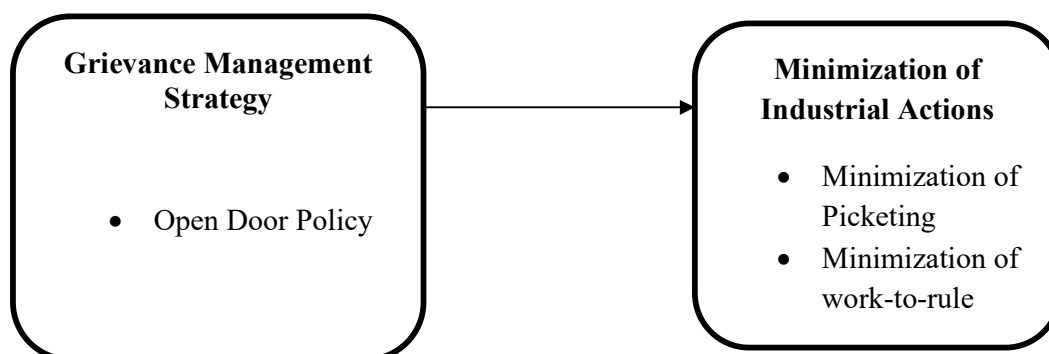


Fig. 1.1: Conceptual Framework Showing grievance management strategy and minimization of industrial action.

Source: Researcher Conceptualization, (2022)

Social Conflict Theory

This work is based on the Karl Marx social conflict theory in 1849 (Carsten, 2010). The Karl Marx social conflict focus to correct the unequal distributions of rewards and employment right between the employees and the employers of corporate organization to ensure harmonious workplace environment. Some of the assumptions of the theory is that:

- i) Change and conflict in every corporate organization are normal and inevitable within the employees and the employers thereby see the need for fair treatment.
- ii) The degree of inequality in corporate organizations exists in varying degrees with people having different amounts of resources; hierarchies exist.
- iii) Structural inequalities in corporate organizations in terms of power and rewards are built into all social structure. Resources are scarce and groups will always compete over these resources.

The justification for the adoption of the social conflict theory as the theoretical foundation of this study is based on the fact that the theory is related to the independent variable (grievance management strategy) as important tool for organizational survival. It explains and predicts conflict management strategy as a tool to ensure the reduction of industrial actions in the workplace. The theory posit and believes that resources are scarce, different groups will always compete which will bring about grievances and that this expression of grievance is inevitable therefore all parties must embrace grievance management strategies such as open door policy, gripe box system and periodic interview in order not to resort to strike actions.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design: For the purpose of this study, the explanatory survey research design was adopted.

Population of the Study: The population of this study consists of 47 managers and supervisors of 10 paint manufacturing firms in Port Harcourt. It was a census study, thus all managers were considered as sample size for the study.

Instrumentation: The questionnaire was the major instrument for data collection.

Administration of Instrument: In line with the sample size, 47 copies of the questionnaire were administered through the help of two research assistants. The administration was carried out within a space of two weeks. More so the researcher was able to retrieved 42 which only 39 were valid thus presenting a return rate of 83%.

Method of Data Analysis: Mean and standard deviation were used for the univariate analysis. While, the bivariate analysis was done using Spearman rank order correlation in SPSS Version 22.0

Results

Ho₁: There is no significant relationship between open door policy and minimization of picketing of plastic manufacturing firms in Port Harcourt.

Table 1: Relationship between open door policy and minimization of picketing Correlations

		Open Door Policy	Minimization of picketing	
Spearman's rho	Open Door Policy	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.621**	
		N	.000	
	Minimization of Picketing	Correlation Coefficient	.621**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	39	39

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The results presented in table 1 indicate that there is a significant correlation between discipline and labour turnover ($r = 0.621, p < 0.01$). Following this finding, the study concludes that there is a significant relationship between open door policy and minimization of picketing of plastic manufacturing firms in Port Harcourt. Therefore, null hypothesis was rejected.

Ho₂: There is no significant relationship between open door policy and minimization of work-to-rule of plastic manufacturing firms in Port Harcourt.

Table 2: Relationship between open door policy and minimization of work-to-rule Correlations

		Open Door Policy	Minimization of Work-to-rule
Spearman's rho	Open Door Policy	Correlation Coefficient	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.445**
		N	39
	Minimization of Work-to-rule	Correlation Coefficient	.445**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	1.000
		N	39

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The results presented in table 1 indicate that there is a significant correlation between discipline and labour turnover ($r = 0.445, p < 0.01$). Following this finding, the study concludes that there is a significant relationship between open door policy and minimization of work-to-rule of plastic manufacturing firms in Port Harcourt. Therefore, null hypothesis was rejected.

Discussion of Findings

Findings revealed that there is a significant relationship between open door policy and minimization of industrial actions (picketing and work-to-rule) of plastic manufacturing firms in Port Harcourt. From the above it is unarguable that open door policy provides a vehicle for more senior managers to understand what is on the minds of employees when they don't regularly interact. Thus, it's crucial that no retaliation be connected to it, or the policy will fail (Oslo- Buchanan, 2016).. Instead, use the tool in a positive and productive way to generate ideas and solve problems. In support, Potgieter and Muller (2018) found that there are numerous benefits to having an open door policy in the workplace, with the potential to bring great value to any business. In most companies, open door policies indicate to employees that a supervisor or manager is open to an employee's questions, complaints, suggestions, and challenges. This helps them to approach managers confidently and settle their challenges. The objective is to encourage open communication, feedback, and discussion about any concerns employees may have so as to minimize industrial actions such as picketing and work-to-rule. Such a policy can help a business maintain employee morale and reduce employee turnover and frequent industrial actions. In turn, employees may feel more inclined to communicate with senior leadership and understand how larger strategies can affect their individual work. Employers can also benefit from learning first-hand what's important to their team (Potgieter & Muller, 2018). Relatively, the study of Zulkiflee et al. (2011) found and concluded that improved communication which the open door policy seek to achieve across all levels of the business help in solving problems between supervisors and their team members. Also, that addressing issues or challenges proactively before they become larger problem areas can also be done through proper implementation of the open door policy, which also serves as a key to minimizing industrial actions among paint manufacturing firms in Port Harcourt.

CONCLUSIONS

It is undisputable that no organization can alienate itself from the grievances of its employees. Thus handling employee grievances is important if industrial actions are to be minimized. Based on the analysis of data and discussion of findings, the study concluded that grievance management strategy such like open door policy minimizes industrial actions (picketing and work-to-rule) plastic firms in Port Harcourt.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Plastic manufacturing firms in Port Harcourt should endeavour to make open door policy a culture in the organization where employees and management can dialogue to reduce picketing.
2. Plastic manufacturing firms should ensure that management and employee have one-in-one interaction usually on weekly or monthly basis so as to hear their grievances and make way for harmonious work environment to prevail, thus minimizing work-to-rule in the organization.

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