

**EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION OF CONFLICT MANIFESTATIONS AND
PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH COLLECTIVE BARGAINING IN AN
INDUSTRIAL ORGANISATION IN LAGOS STATE, NIGERIA**

Agbomehre M. Momoh

*Department of Adult Education
University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria
agboosho@yahoo.com*

Abstract

Arising from the incessant conflicts between the workforce and management DN Meyer Plc- a renowned industrial organisation in Lagos State, Nigeria, this study was carried out to find out the causes of conflict and the problems associated with collective bargaining process put in place in the organisation. The study adopted the descriptive survey research design since the conflicts have already manifested in the organization. 200 purposively selected respondents comprising the employees, the union leaders and management constituted the sample size. Labour management relation scale ($r = 0.71$) was the major instrument used for data collection. Data obtained were analysed using Pearson Moment Correlation Coefficient. Results showed that poor wages and salaries administration, termination of employee's appointment, poor working conditions, and denials of promotion were the major causes of conflicts in the organisation while the collective bargaining process was marred by confrontation, delay in reaching compromise, management unwillingness in implementing agreements reached, and the threat of no work no pay by the employers. Based on these findings, the study recommended that payment of salary as at when due, timely promotion of workers, timely payment of overtime allowance, and provision of work tools should be given prominence by every organisation. Similarly, inclusive collective bargaining procedure involving all the representatives of the workers and management should be instituted.

Key Words: Conflict Manifestations, Problems Associated with Collective Bargaining, Industrial Organisation

Introduction

Conflict is an inevitable fact of any organizations life. Organizations that accept this axiom do so for many different reasons, and those that do, are able to access the beneficial potential of conflict. It occurs in all human relationships, be it in the family, institution or organization. Organization is typically understood to be system/ group of people of coordinated and controlled activities that arise when work is embedded in complex networks of technical relations and boundary-spanning exchanges. In effect, organizational conflict can be described as the interaction of interdependent people who perceive incompatible goals and interference from each other in achieving those goals. Conflict management produce a cooperative atmosphere is created for promoting opportunities and movement directed towards non-violent, reconciliation or basic clashing interest.

Conflict is a necessary and useful part of organizational high life. It is not only inevitable but an integral part of the process of change. Indeed, it is an aid to cooperation, not an obstacle. Constructively managed conflict induces a positive performance while poorly managed conflict heats up the environment to bring about 'dislocation of the entire group and polarization, reduced productivity on job performance, psychological and physical injury, emotional distress and inability to sleep, interference with problem activities, escalation of differences into antagonistic position and malice and increased hostility.

Concept of Conflict

The term conflict originated from the Latin word "conflictus" meaning striking together with force (Fostyth) cited in Akanji, Akpama, Andong, Ojisi, (2005). Conflict occurs when the action or beliefs of one or more members of a group are unacceptable to and hence are resisted by one or more group members. Conflict arises from the pursuit of divergent interests, goals and aspirations by individual or groups in defined social and physical environments (Otite, 1999). Coser, (1956) in Oghenekohwo (2003) opines that conflict is a 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. Arising from this conceptualization is the fact that conflict may take place

between individuals, between collectivities, or between individuals and collectivities.

Meanwhile, Hellriegel and Slocum (1975) in Oghenekohwo (2003) says, "Conflict is a sharp disagreement or collision in objectives, interests, ideas and the likes". To Pettam (1975), "Conflict refers to the putative incompatibilities that precede a collision". Conflict is a dynamic phenomenon which consists of five stages, initiation, escalation, controlled maintenance, abatement and termination or resolution (Sandole, 1993).

Hocker and Wilmot (1985) say that conflict is an expressed struggle between at least two interdependent parties who perceive incompatible goals, scarce rewards and interference from the other party in achieving their goal, This definition highlights properties that are both tangible and intangible conflict is the product of interaction between or among parties. Conflict is a way of settling problems origination g from opposing interests and for the continuity of society, (the industrial society inclusive). Besides, it involves situations in which differences are expressed by interdependent people (the tripartite in industrial relations) in the process of achieving their needs and goals (Donohue and Kolt, 1992), and it arises when a difference between two (or more) people necessitates change in at least one person in order for their engagement to continue and develop. The differences cannot co-exist without some adjustment (Jordan, 1990).

Conflict then, can be regarded ss a reality of management and organizational behavior which Mullins 1996) defines as "behavior intended to obstruct the achievement of some other person's goals. Thus, it is based on the incompatibility of goals and arises from opposing behaviors", (p. 726). Conflict situation denote both incompatible goals and opposing behavior. It is inevitable in organizations because, Arrnstong (1999) observes that it functions by means of adjustments and compromises among competitive elements in their structure and members.

Conflict may therefore not be regarded only in a negative light as dysfunctional or disjunctive process and a breakdown of communication as some scholars tend to suggest (Lundberg, 1939, Wilson and Kolh, 1949). Conflicts may generally exist "whenever incompatible activities occur" (Deuch, 1973) and may result in a "win-lose" character, the resolution, transformation, and management of

conflicts may produce a “win-win” situation (Otite, 1999). Organizational conflict in a more contemporary discourse is seen as part of organizational life which Wehrich and Koontz (2005) contextualize as occurring within the individual, between individuals, between the individual and the group and between groups.

While conflict is generally perceived as dysfunctional, it can also be beneficial because it may cause issues to be presented in different perspectives. Laderach (1995) described conflict as an on-going situation that is based on deep-seated differences of values, ideologies and goals. These differences, according to him, are hard to resolve because they reflect the core values of the disputants. Hammed (2000) describes conflict as the interaction of interdependent people who perceive incompatible goals and interference from each other in achieving those goals.

Conflict is a frustration based protest against lack of opportunities for development and against lack of recognition and identity (Cunningham 1998). In essence, if the frustration is removed, there is likelihood of getting the conflict terminated. Fakunle (2005) perceived conflict as a situation in which two or more human beings derive goals which they perceive as being attainable by one of the other but not by both. This definition suggests that there will be conflict when people’s ideas or values or actions are attempting to occupy the same space at the same time. Burton (1991) referred to conflicts as a breakdown in relationships and a challenge to norms and to authorities.

Concept of Industrial Conflict

Industrial conflict is the inability of parties (either between employer and employees or within their groups) to reach agreement on any issue concerned with the object of employer-employees interaction, whether or not this inability results in strikes or lockouts or other forms of protestations (Fajana., 2006). Industrial conflict, according to Kornhauser, Dubin and Ross 1954 in Fajana (2006), is the total range of behavior and attitudes that express opposition and divergent orientations between individual owners and managers on the one hand and working people and their organization on the other.

Oghenekohwo (2003) has operationalised industrial conflict as meaning one or all of the following scenarios:

- The putative incompatibilities that proceed a collision;

- A situation in which two or more motives are partially blocking one another, thus, it shows a degree of cognitive difference concerning the perception and interpretation of the parties involved,
- A sharp disagreement or collision in objectives, interests, ideas and the likes, and
- Incompatibility between two opposing interests

From the above, it is obvious that the issues of interest and disagreement are important variables in the analysis of industrial conflict in any organized group. Oghenekohwo, (2003) provided a justification for the theoretical basis for conflict which scholars have attributed to three theories, namely: traditional, human relations, and interaction theories (Rotheild, 1969, Kupper and Smith, 1971, Jordan, 1990, & Oghenekowo, 2003).

Akanji (2005), citing the European Foundation for the improvement of Living and working conditions, conceptualised industrial conflict as the clash of interest and resulting disputes of varying intensity between individuals, groups and organizations in the industrial relations system. Edwards (2000) explained that conflict in organizations includes interdepartmental tensions. Based on that fact, he said industrial conflict refers to those aspects connected with the employment relationship: the employment of one person by another for the production of a defined product or service. The organizational environment is a sub-set of the entire general environment which is defined in its pluralistic contest and as such, conflict cannot be discussed outside the context of pluralistic situation. This is because pluralism and conflict are related in complex ways, which in the view of Kuper and Smith (1971) in Oghenekohwo (2003) depicts a situation of co-existing diverse and basic compulsory institutional and cultural arrangements involving dominance and subordination in the same social setting.

According to Otite (1999), recent and current ideas of pluralism regard it as multidisciplinary and multidimensional, and defied it in the context of cultural diversity and social segmentation of an encapsulating society. A plural society is thus characterized by co-existing but distinct cultural diversities and compulsory social institutions which determine and guide the individual and group

behaviors of the incorporated people. Omole and Adegoke (2001) identified two schools of thought that have bearing on industrial conflict. They are the “pluralist” or the “conflict school” and the “co-operation school”. The pluralists hold that employers and employees basically have opposing interest because while employers want to minimize cost, employees want to avoid an unreasonable amount of effort and maximize their compensation. These opposing interest results in conflict which the pluralists hold are desirable.

The “co-operation school” contends that there is a basic similarity of interests between employers and employees, primarily because they are members of and dependent on the same organization. In the same manner, the school articulates that conflict is dysfunctional and even dangerous because it of ten times interferes with efficient and effective running of the organization. Also, it creates unpleasant encounters between employers and employees and often leads to violence against persons and property. Therefore, to the “co-operation school” conflict occurs much less from opposing interests and more from breakdown in communication, understanding or trust. Hence, conflict is seen as avoidable and should be avoided as its cost for exceeds its benefits.

Types, Nature and Causes of Industrial Conflicts

Mullins (1996) observed that conflicts are basically classified as interpersonal; inter-group, intrapersonal, and structural. In other words, in the industrial setting, conflicts do occur between two people, groups of unions, with/among group, within an individual in role or functional role. The understanding is that, conflicts could be interpersonal, intrapersonal, inter group (between management and union), intra group (between two factions in a union) and structural (Combination of the two or more). Mullin (1996) identified differences in perception, limited resources (scarcity role conflict, inequitable limited resources (scarcity), role conflicts, inequitable treatment, violation of territory and environmental change/technological change as constituting major predictors. In his contribution Armstrong (1999) identified change, always seen as a threat, and which needs to be challenged or resisted and frustration as predictors of industrial conflict.

Akintayo (2002) observed that any changes which occur on account of ownership and control of scarce resources, unequal distribution of scarce resources, management and control of scarce resources, and non-implementation of agreed negotiations among parties will lead to conflicts. Wehrich and Koontz (2005) established that a major reason for conflict in organizations is that people do not understand their assignments (role conflict) and those of the coworkers. Besides, Wehrich et al also identified complex relationship in workplace, high degree of task interdependence, incompatible goals of the parties differences in values, interests and perceptions of issues, line and staff positioning, superior autocratic leadership style, differing educational backgrounds and most often mentioned is lack of communication (effective, relative).

Ekeh-Momoh (2004) identified causes of conflict in organizations as poor wages and salaries administration, poor supervision of work, termination of employee's appointment, partiality in training schemes, inflexible working hours, and lack of both internal and physical working condition as well as conflict emanating from worker's unions.

Hammed (2002) identified other manifestations of conflict on the side of workers as;

1. Absenteeism: This is a situation where workers decide not to report for work without prior notice to that effect.
2. Sabotage: This is a situation where workers might decide to be working at cross bar with the aims of the organization. It includes deliberate damage of organization's equipment.
3. High rate of Labor turnover: This is the rate at which workers come into the organization and the rate at which they are leaving the organization.
4. Pilfering: This has to do with the rate at which equipment and products are stolen in the organization.
5. Restriction of output: Under this arrangement, workers might decide to reduce the number of their daily production to show their grievances.

Whereas on the part of the employers, they might use the lockout, plant closure, victimization, blacklisting, etc. these are to show their discontentment with their employees.

Collective Bargaining

Collective bargaining is a process of decision making between employers and workers or employers' representative and union organizations concerning terms and conditions of employment. In Nigeria, individual bargaining started to be replaced by collective bargaining in 1942 with the appointment of Whitley Council and the introduction of collective bargaining into the public sector of the Nigerian economy. These were an earlier attempt at collective bargaining. Fashoyin (1980) stated that available evidence indicated that one of the first attempts at collective bargaining, and clearly a major one, made by workers to assert their rights was met with resistance. The Federal Ministry of Labor and Productivity in Ekeh-Mommoh (2004) defined collective bargaining in the traditional sense as:

Negotiations about working conditions and terms of employers between an employer, a group of employers and one or more employers organizations, on the one hand and one or more representative or workers' organizations on the other hand with a view to reaching agreement.

In the view of NECA, in Ekeh-Mommoh (2004), collective bargaining is a process of decision-making. Its overriding purpose is the negotiation of an agreed set of rules to govern the substantive and procedural terms of employment relationship.

Collective bargaining can be seen from three perspectives which represent different stages in the development of the collective bargaining process. The three perspectives are means of contracting for the sale of labor form of industrial government and a system of industrial relations (Chamberlain, 1959 and Kuhn, 1983). Collective bargaining is an economic institution with trade unionism acting as a labor cartel Y controlling entry into trade. Collective bargaining is standard setting machinery which constitutes an important source of regulation governing wages, salaries and other employment conditions mutually agreed between labor and management and in conformity with public policy.

According to Labor Act of 1974 collective bargaining is the process of arriving at or attempting to arrive at a collective agreement.

Collective bargaining is the means of rule making which governs the work place (Dunlop, 1958 cited by Fajana, 2006); it is seen as a form of industrial government which leads to industrial democracy. It is superior over other decision making procedures as a form of joint industrial government, as a way of managing complex organizations and as a means of setting wage rates and other terms of employment and of regulating labor management relations.

Collective bargaining is specifically an industrial relations mechanism tool and is an aspect of negotiation, applicable to the employment relationship. As a process, the two are in essence the same, and the principles applicable to negotiations are relevant to collective bargaining as well (Silva, 1996). In collective bargaining, the union always has a collective interest since the negotiations are for the benefit of several employees. Where collective bargaining is not for one employer but for several, collective interests becomes a feature for both parties to the bargaining process. Collective bargaining has been defined as: "negotiations about working conditions and terms of employment between an employer's organization on one hand, and one or more representative workers' organization on the other with a view to reaching agreement (Robertson, 1988).

Statement of the Problem

In DN Meyer plc, the organization has experienced series of conflict between the employees and management which have significantly marred the attainment of the organisation's goals and objectives.

Research Questions

- What are the causes of conflict between within the organisation?
- What the problems associated with collective bargaining process within the organisation?
- What implications would the findings of this study have on other similar organisations?

Methodology

The research design adopted for this study is descriptive survey research design. This is for the purpose of establishing the relationship between collective bargaining approach (independent variable) and

conflict management (dependent variable). The study population consists of all workers in DN Meyer Plc; which comprise the union leaders, employers and employees who had spent at least, 3 years in the selected work organization. 200 respondents were purposively selected from the employees, their union representatives, and management. A structured questionnaire tagged "labour management relation scale" was the major instrument used for data collection. The questionnaire was complimented with oral interview as available records from the selected organisation. A reliability coefficient of $r = 0.71$ was ascertain, this confirmed the reliability of the instrument. Data that was collected through the questionnaire was analyzed using simple percentages, frequency counts and Pearson Moment Correlation Coefficient.

Results

Research Question 1: What are the causes of conflict within the organisation?

Table 1: Respondents views on the causes of conflict within the organisation

S/N	Causes of Conflict	SA	A	SD	D	Total
	Poor wages and salaries administration has often lead to conflict in the organisation	88 44.0%	62 31.0%	50 25.0%		200 100.0%
	Termination of employee`s appointments, as well as poor supervision of work lead to grievances	100 50.0%	100 50.0%	- -	- -	200 100.0%
	Poor general working condition both internal and physical working condition cause conflict	76 38.0%	78 39.0%	20 10.0%	20 13.0%	200 100.0%
	Conflict often	100	52	20	28	200

	emanate from inadequate supply of equipment to work with	50.0%	26.0%	10.0%	14.0%	100.0%
	Lack of penalty in training scheme in favour of some workers cause conflict	99 49.5%	80 40.0%	10 5.0%	11 5.5%	200 100.0%
	Benefits not given when due causes conflict	89 44.5%	91 45.5%	10 5.0%	10 5.0%	200 100.0%
	Denials of promotion of workers resulted to conflict	120 60.0%	58 29.0%	22 11.0%	- -	200 100.0%
	Retrenchment and casualization of junior workers cause conflict	89 44.5%	83 41.5%	10 10.0%	18 9.0%	200 100.0%

Discussion of Result

Table 1 above shows that 150 (75.0%) respondents agreed that poor wages and salaries administration has often lead to conflict organization while 50 (25.0%) respondents disagreed, 200 (100.0%) respondents agreed that termination of employee's appointment as well as poor supervision of work leads to grievances while 0 (0.0%) respondent disagreed, 154 (77.0%) respondents agreed that poor general working condition both internal and physical working condition causes conflict while 46 (23.0%) respondents disagreed, 152 (76.0%) respondents agreed that lack inadequate supply of equipment to work with while 48 (24.0%) respondent disagreed, 179 (89.5%) respondents agreed that lack or partiality in training scheme in favour of some workers causes conflict while 21 (10.5%) respondents disagreed, 180 (90%) respondents agreed that benefits not given where due causes conflict while 20 (10.0%) respondents disagreed, 178 (89.0%) respondents agreed that denials of promotion of workers have often resulted to conflict while 22 (11.0%) respondents disagreed, 172

(86.0%) respondents agreed that retrenchment and casualization of junior workers cause conflict while 28 (14.0%) respondents disagreed .

Research Question 2: What are the problems associated with Collective Bargaining within the organisation?

Table 2: Contingency table showing the Problems associated with Collective Bargaining Process within the organisation

S/N	STATEMENTS	SA	A	SD	D	X	R	P
	Collective bargaining is a standard settling machinery for conflict management	78 39.0%	71 35.5%	30 15.0%	21 10.5%	72.19		
	Collective bargaining through joint negotiation is an effective tool in conflict management	69 34.5%	82 41.0%	0 0.0%	49 24.5%	71.73	0.73	0.05
	Confrontation is a major problem confronting the successful application of Collective bargaining in resolving conflicts within the organisation.	73 36.5%	61 30.5%	36 18.0%	30 15.0%			
	Delay in reaching compromise arising from the No work	66 33.0%	77 38.5%	20 10.0%	37 18.5%			

	No pay threat of management.							
	Management unwillingness in implementing agreements reached.	68 34.0%	69 34.5%	18 9.0%	45 22.5%			

Discussion of Result

Table 2 shows that 149 (74.5%) respondents agreed that collective bargaining is a standard setting machinery for conflict management. 151 (75.5%) respondents agreed that collective bargaining through joint negotiation is an effective tool in conflict management. 134 (67.0%) respondents agreed that Confrontation is a major problem confronting the successful application of Collective bargaining in resolving conflicts within the organisation. Similarly, 143 (71.5%) respondents agreed that delay in reaching compromise arising from the no work no pay threat of management is another major problem while 137 (68.5%) respondents agreed that management unwillingness in implementing agreements reached was another major problem.

Furthermore, the findings show that the mean score of collective bargaining was 72.19 while that of conflict resolution was 71.73. The correlation coefficient was 0.73 which shows a significant relationship between collective bargaining and conflict management/resolution. The findings agree with the findings of Omole (2003), Okedara (1998), Faniran (2002), Edward (2001) and Abu (1998) who reported that a strong relationship was found between collective bargaining and conflict resolution. The major findings of this study, therefore, include the following: the causes of conflicts between labour and management union are as a result of nonpayment of salary as at when due, benefits like promotion areas are not given as at when due, casualisation of workers, unpaid overtime allowance, and lack of tools to work with, among others.

Similarly, confrontation, delay in reaching compromise arising from the No work No pay threat of management, and management unwillingness in implementing agreements reached are the major

problem confronting the successful application of Collective bargaining in resolving conflicts within the organisation.

Recommendations

The findings of this study have established that causes of conflicts within the organisation are usually multifarious and multidimensional in nature. However, an organisation that is interested in industrial peace and harmony must pay more attention to payment of salary as at when due, timely promotion of workers are due, casualisation should be discouraged, timely payment of overtime allowance, and provision of work tools among other. Similarly, every organisation, as a matter of policy, should institute a state of the organisation address by the management to intimate workers with developments within the organisation as well as inclusive collective bargaining procedure involving all the representative of the workers and management.

Conclusion

Since collective bargaining has been found to be very effective in conflict resolution and management depending on the level of aspiration of the involved parties to foster peace, it is therefore imperative for the employers and trade union representatives to create free atmosphere through which collective bargaining process could be maximally explored especially in decision making process that could impact industrial peace and harmonious labour-management relations in industrial relations in Nigeria.

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