

Social Challenges of Industrial Relations: A Study of Federal Polytechnic Oil and Gas, Bonny, Rivers State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper was to investigate the social challenges of Industrial Relations in Federal Polytechnic Oil and Gas, Bonny, Rivers State, Nigeria and to evaluate the different Industrial Relations which were carried out in most organizations. The research design was descriptive survey to investigation and observed the proper Industrial Relations Practices which were carried out in Oil and Gas companies operating in the Bonny, Rivers State, Nigeria. It very important for companies to avoid societal conflicts and discontents, ensure industrial peace and harmony, as a result of achieving better performance, at work place which encourage productivity and growth. Human being are the active agents who accumulate capital, exploit natural resources, build social, economical and political organizations and carry forward national development.

Keywords-- Industrial Relations and Social Challenges and Conflicts, Productivity, Economic Development, Industrial Democracy

I. INTRODUCTION

The term Industrial Relations" refers to relationship between Management and Labor or among Employees and their Organizations that characterize or grow out of employment. Theoretically speaking, there are two parties in the „employment“ relationship labor and management. Both parties need to work in a spirit of cooperation, adjustment and accommodation. In their own mutual interest certain rules for co-existence are formed and adhered to. Over the years, the State has also come to play a major role in Industrial Relations one, as an initiator of policies and the other, as an employer by setting up an extremely large public sector.

Industrial Relations are fairly multi-dimensional in nature as they are influenced, by a complex set of institutional, economic and technological factors. Industrial Relations change with the times, generally keeping pace with the expectations of employees, trade union, employers' associations, and other economic and social

institution in a society. The Industrial Relations system is characterized by forces of conflict and compromise on either side. In the large interests of society, both the employer and the employees must put out fires amicably and get along with each other in a spirit of compromise and accommodation. The individual differences and disagreements must be dissolved through persuasion and even pressure. The factors responsible for conflict situations need to be resolved through constructive means. The government influences and shapes.

Industrial Relations with the help of laws, rules, agreements, awards of courts and emphasis on usages, customs, traditions, as well as the implementation of its policies and interference through executive and judicial machinery.

To Katz and Kochan (2000), industrial relations is a broad interdisciplinary field of study that encompasses all aspects of the employment relationship. It is concerned with how the policies that govern employment relations and the work itself affect workers and their interests, as well as the interests of the organization and the larger society. Ratnam (2006) says that industrial relations focuses on relations between employers or managers and workers and their unions in the production/service process.

To a worker, in this relationship, the most significant and primary aspect of his job is the money income he derives from the job, his earnings. There may be other important elements of satisfaction and dissatisfaction attached to the work process itself, but despite their significance, one thing is certain: he would not be at the job unless it pays him money. He might be willing to put up with poor working conditions at times or an unreasonable supervisor or an uncongenial work crew or a monotonous operation, at least as long as nothing better was available, but he would not put up for a moment with the discipline of a job that does not pay him money or an income. His pecuniary earnings come, according to Chamberlain and Cullen (2011), if he is a manual worker, in the form of an hourly wage rate times the number of hours he works. If he is a white-collar employee, they usually are paid in the form of a salary which is simply a wage rate for a period longer

than an hour, usually a week, or a month depending on the condition(s) of employment and the country involved.

Objective of the study

The general objective of the study is to determine social challenges of industrial relations: a study of federal polytechnic oil and gas, bonny, Rivers State, Nigeria.

Specifically objectives

1. To determine the social challenges of industrial Relations in oil and gas companies in bonny
2. To evaluate the different industrial relation carried out in oil and gas companies in Bonny
3. To investigate the main purpose of industrial relations at large
4. To determine the why industrial relations were essential in companies.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Yesufu (1983), viewed industrial relations as a whole web of human interactions at work which is predicated upon and arises out of employment contract. In this context, it is believed that a form of relationship exists between workers and the management of oil producing companies in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. Margarism (1969) looked at industrial relations as the concept that forms the study of people in a situational organization or system, while Dunlop (1958) looked at it as labour and industrial relations, a web of rules that bind the actors in the workplace. To him, industrial relations is a study which investigates the actions of workers, management and government in a geographical environment where an organization is located or operating.

Borka (2016) is of the opinion that industrial (sometimes called labour) relations encompasses the study of the employment relationship existing between an organization's employees and its employers and how this relationship affects workers' attitudes, behaviour, employment practices and policies and the way some external bodies can intervene, and why, during periods of employee and employer discontents. The rationale of the discipline of industrial relations, according to him, is continued significance of work for the maintenance and advancement of human societies. This necessitates the existence of a vitally consequential labour or employment group, which is involved in a fundamental economic, social and political relationship with employers and management. The outcome of this relationship is so crucial to the long-term survival, let alone continued prosperity of any country, that it inevitably includes the state or government as well.

In more detail, industrial relations scholars tend to assume that in every industrial and industrializing country, there are three main "actors" or parties with partly common and partly divergent interests involved. These are

employers and managers, employees and labour (and often trade unions) and the state. A degree of conflict between these groups is regarded as inevitable, but there are typically mechanisms to ensure that it is channelled or accommodated, notably:

1. Individual resolution (supported by freedom of contract and by the lack of any substantial restrictions to the operations of the labour market).
2. Unilateral determination (by employers, managers, the state, trade unions or workers).
3. Plural modes of regulation (typically under collective bargaining in which differences are expressed, articulated and defend through independent association of employers and employees and which joint determination and responsibility for the terms and conditions of employment have been instituted).

It is further assumed that interests may be shared or conflicting in both the so-called production and distribution processes in organizations. The first encompasses the actual work process, the second, is the economic rewards which accrue from employment. On the one hand, a series of creative or productive activities are defined by the functions of all organizations. But while their performance may be free of conflict, there are often fundamental struggles along the frontier of control between workers who seek freedom on the job and managers and supervisors who endeavour to plan the overall organization and conduct of work processes. Equally, the allocation of employee rewards may also occasion consensus or conflict. The former depends on fairness or organizational justice governing the principles of distribution.

2.1 Causes of Poor Industrial Relations

The following are the main causes of poor industrial relation

1. **Economic causes:** Often poor wages and poor working conditions are the main causes for unhealthy relations between management and labour. Unauthorized deductions from wages, lack of fringe benefits, absence of promotion opportunities, faulty incentive schemes are other economic causes. Other causes for Industrial conflicts are inadequate infrastructure, worn-out plant and machinery, poor layout, unsatisfactory maintenance etc.
2. **Organisational causes:** Faulty communications system, unfair practices, non-recognition of trade unions and labour laws are also some other causes of poor relations in industry.
3. **Social causes:** Uninteresting nature of work is the main social cause of poor Industrial relations. Dissatisfaction with job and personal life culminates into Industrial conflicts.
4. **Psychological causes:** Lack of job security, non-recognition of merit and performance, poor interpersonal

relations are the psychological reasons for unsatisfactory employer-employee relations.

5. Political causes: Multiple unions, inter-union rivalry weaken the trade unions. Defective trade unions system prevailing in the country has been one of the most responsible causes for Industrial disputes in the country.

2.2 Measures for Improving Industrial Relations

Good and harmonious industrial relations create a sense of belongingness and group-cohesiveness among workers and also a congenial environment resulting in less industrial unrest, grievances and disputes. This will ensure optimum use of resources, both human and materials, eliminating all types of wastage. Good industrial relations, built -in mutual cooperation and common agreed approach motivate one to contribute one's best, result in higher productivity and hence income, give more job satisfaction and help improve the morale of the workers. The following measures can be adopted for improving industrial relations in an organization.

1. Sound personnel policies: Policies and procedures concerning the compensation, transfer and promotion, etc. of employees should be fair and transparent. All policies and rules relating to Industrial relations should be fair and transparent to everybody in the enterprise and to the union leaders.

2. Participative management: Employees should associate workers and unions in the formulation and implementation of HR policies and practices.

3. Responsible unions: A strong trade union is an asset to the employer. Trade unions should adopt a responsible rather than political approach to industrial relations.

4. Employee welfare: Employers should recognize the need for the welfare of workers. They must ensure reasonable wages, satisfactory working conditions, and other necessary facilities for labour. Management should have a genuine concern for the welfare and betterment of the working class.

5. Grievance procedure: A well-established and properly administered system committed to the timely and satisfactory redressal of employee's grievances can be very helpful in improving Industrial relations. A suggestion scheme will help to satisfy the creative urge of the workers.

6. Constructive attitude: Both management and trade unions should adopt positive attitude towards each other. Management must recognize unions as the spokesmen of the workers' grievances and as custodians of their interests.

The employer should accept workers as equal partners in a joint endeavor for good industrial relations.

7. Creating a proper communication channel to avoid grievances and misunderstandings among employees.

8. Education and training should be imparted to the employees.

9. Strong and Stable Union: A strong and stable union in each industrial enterprise is essential for good industrial

relations and to represent the majority of workers and negotiate with the management about the terms and conditions of service.

10. Mutual trust: Both management and labor should help in the development of an atmosphere of mutual cooperation, confidence and respect. Management should adopt a progressive outlook and should recognize the rights of workers. Similarly, labor unions should persuade their members to work for the common objectives of the organization. Both the management and the unions should have faith in collective bargaining and other peaceful methods of settling disputes.

11. Sincere implementation of agreements: The management should sincerely implement the settlements reached with the trade unions. The agreements between the management and the unions should be enforced both in letter and spirit.

12. Governments' role: The government should play an active role for promoting industrial peace. It should make law for the compulsory recognition of a representative union in each industrial unit. It should intervene to settle disputes if the management and the workers are unable to settle their disputes. This will restore industrial harmony.

2.3 Eliminate Some Social Challenges

Katz and Kochan (2000) and Ratnam (2006) have advocated some strategic approach to solving the problems of industrial relations in order to avoid or eliminate some attendant social challenges. These include but not limited to:

1. Participation of workers' representatives in the management of their organizations. Representational system provides an avenue by which decision - making is being shared between employees and management. This provides the means by which employees have a real say in decisions that affect them. This system is called industrial democracy. By this system, some workers can be co-opted into the managerial team for representing the interest of the workers in decisions affecting them. The co-opting approach is used in a situation where the workers feel alienated and disenfranchised and that they are not properly represented in decisions affecting them. Co-opting could also be used to change workers' perceptions or negative attitudes towards management and to create industrial harmony and stability. This leads to increase in productivity and profitability (Nwaeke, 1983).

2. Collective bargaining: This is another means through which workers participate in decisions that affect them on the job. During this process, the management and workers' representatives meet to negotiate on terms guiding their employment contract or relationship. The parties involved in the process will jointly establish the rules guiding the behaviour of both parties (employer and employees) in their relationship.

3. Work Groups: Work groups involve the development of functional group of people and allocation of work to the group and not individuals. In these groups, employees may have control over all the immediate factors concerning their works and such groups may be given freehand to decide on the target of the group norms, group leadership, and needs. Work groups are also involved in such functions as individual procedures and techniques, internal distribution of tasks, group production methods, etc.

4. Joint consultative committee: The joint consultative committee includes employee council, shop steward committee, staff committee and workers' council that have the ability to resolve industrial conflicts.

5. Financial Participation: A new dimension in resolving conflicts in organizations involve workers or employees participating in key decision making through buying of shares in the organization. When workers buy shares in the organization, they feel committed to the organization. Management can also ensure the financial participation of employees through a system of profit sharing in the organization. Profit sharing involves the use of "Scanlion Principle" which is a compensation system based on a company-wide incentive system that results in the sharing of rewards caused by improved productivity, cost reduction or improved quality (Ivancevich et al, 1997).

6. Improving the content of the job. This is one of the ways to ensure the participation of employees in decision-making by improving the content of the job through job design, job enrichment and job enlargement, to mention but a few.

Nwaeke and Wodu (2005) said that improving social challenges of the Oil Producing Companies of Nigeria will also involve the following:

1. Establishing a community development programme to serve its host communities.
2. Working with host communities and with government donours, non-governmental organizations, community based groups and other stakeholders to strengthen relationships between and amongst them.
3. Encouraging the full participation of host communities in project planning, implementation and monitoring to ensure their full satisfaction and minimize conflicts.
4. Maintaining adequate communication lines with all social segments of host communities in order to address critical issues and their various needs. This will curb restiveness.
5. Focusing on community development assistance programmes on activities having high impact and broad social benefits for the host population.

6. Paying special attention to the most economic disadvantaged social groups in all their areas of operation.
7. Establishing and maintaining close relationship with all segments of the local population to better understand their concerns, needs and aspirations.
8. Continuously assessing and abating the social, political, economic and technological impacts of all business activities and take needed preventive and mitigating measures.

2.4 Importance of Industrial Relation for Employees and Employers

Industrial relations usually imply good and positive relations between the employees and employers. The healthy industrial relations are key to the progress. Their significance may be discussed as under

1. Foster Industrial Peace

Under the mechanism of IR, both employees and managers discuss the matter and consult each other before initiating any actions. Doubts, if any, in the minds of either party are removed. Thus, unilateral actions that prop confusion and misunderstanding disappear from the scene. In this way, IR helps create a peaceful environment in the organization. Peace, in turn, breeds prosperity.

2. Promote Industrial Democracy

Industrial democracy means the government mandated worker participation at various levels of the organization with regard to decisions that affect workers. It is mainly the joint consultations that pave the way for industrial democracy and cement relationship between workers and management. This benefits the both. The motivated workers give their best and maximum to the organization, on the one hand, and share their share of the fruits of organizational progress jointly with management, on the other.

3. Benefit to Workers

IR benefits workers in several ways. For example, it protects workers against unethical practices on the part of management to exploit workers by putting them under inhuman working conditions and niggardly wages. It also provides a procedure to resolve workers' grievances relating to work.

4. Benefit to Management

IR protects the rights of managers too. As and when workers create the problem of indiscipline, IR provides managers with a system to handle with employee indiscipline in the organization.

5. Uninterrupted production & Improve Productivity

The most important benefit of industrial relations is that this ensures continuity of production. This means, continuous employment for all from manager to workers. The resources are fully utilized, resulting in the maximum possible production. There is uninterrupted flow of income for all. Smooth running of an industry is of vital importance

for several other industries; to other industries if the products are intermediaries or inputs; to exporters if these are export goods; to consumers and workers, if these are goods of mass consumption. Experiences indicate that good industrial relations serve as the key for increased productivity in industrial organizations.

6. Reduction in Industrial Disputes

Good industrial relation reduce the industrial disputes. Disputes are reflections of the failure of basic human urges or motivations to secure adequate satisfaction or expression which are fully cured by good industrial relations. Strikes, lockouts, go-slow tactics, gherao and grievances are some of the reflections of industrial unrest which do not spring up in an atmosphere of industrial peace. It helps promoting co-operation and increasing production.

2.5 Social Challenges of Poor Industrial Relations

There are a lot of social challenges that can occur or arise from lack of or poor implementation of proper industrial relations strategies in organizations and society in general. Among these social challenges are:

1. Low purchasing power of citizens in the market system and inability of citizens to meet their economic and social demands or obligations may result from poor income or salaries, unfair termination of employment or outright redundancy. Families may break-up, children's school fees may be left unpaid and a lot of families may find it difficult to meet their health service needs. The level of child labour may increase. All these can result from a general poverty level due to inadequate circulation of income that enhances the purchasing power of citizens of a country.

2. Ecological problems may increase. Damages of the ecosystem can constitute a social challenge. Examples of this type of social challenge are the Ogoni, Iko, Odi, Bonny, Nembe, Obagi, Obirikom, Diobu Creek, Rumudioga, Warri crises which threw members of these communities and the entire Nigerian society into a state of quandary. Major causes of this crises are pipe and flow station vandalism which are strains of sabotage arising from unsatisfied oil workers and lack of effort by government(s) to intervene.

3. Insecurity in the political system of the nation. This can result from riots, demonstrations, confrontations and uncontrollable youth restiveness due to lack of satisfaction over attitudes of the oil producing companies towards workers and citizens of their host communities. The unjustifiable killing of Chief Ken Saro - Wiwa is a case in point.

4. Economic problems can arise out of poor industrial relations outfit. This, according to Locorsky (1985) constitutes a major social challenge to society. This comprises products market, the labour market, money market and technological innovation. According to him, the ability of a company to meet its obligations to workers may

be a function of the demand of the company's product. If a company is unable to sell its products, such a company may not be able to retain its market share and level of profitability. This can force the company to embark on retrenchment of workers; certain governmental monetary or fiscal policies may also affect workers, as some requirements of a new technology do. All these may make some workers become obsolete, prone to redundancy and very poor economically.

Nwaeke and Wodu (2005) said that improving social challenges of the Oil and Gas Companies of Nigeria will also involve the following:

1. Encouraging the full participation of host communities in project planning, implementation and monitoring to ensure their full satisfaction and minimize conflicts.
2. Maintaining adequate communication lines with all social segments of host communities in order to address critical issues and their various needs.
3. Focusing on community development assistance programmes on activities having high impact and broad social benefits for the host population.
4. Paying special attention to the most economic disadvantaged social groups in all their areas of operation.
5. Establishing and maintaining close relationship with all segments of the local population to better understand their concerns, needs and aspirations.

2.6 Determining Factors of Industrial Relations

Good industrial relations depend on a great variety of factors.

History of industrial relations – No enterprise can escape its good and bad history of industrial relations. A good history is marked by harmonious relationship between management and workers. A bad history by contrast is characterized by militant strikes and lockouts. Both types of history have a tendency to perpetuate themselves.

Economic satisfaction of workers – Psychologists recognize that human needs have a certain priority. Need number one is the basic survival need. Much of men conducted are dominated by this need. Man works because he wants to survive. This is all the more for underdeveloped countries where workers are still living under subsistence conditions. Hence economic satisfaction of workers is another important prerequisite for good industrial relations.

Social and Psychological satisfaction – Identifying the social and psychological urges of workers is a very important steps in the direction of building good industrial relations. A man does not live by bread alone. He has several other needs besides his physical needs which should also be given due attention by the employer. An organization is a joint venture involving a climate of human and social relationships wherein each participant feels that he is fulfilling his needs and contributing to the needs of

others. This supportive climate requires economic rewards as well as social and psychological rewards such as workers' participation in management, job enrichment, suggestion schemes, redressal of grievances etc.

Off-the-Job Conditions – An employer employs a whole person rather than certain separate characteristics. A person's traits are all part of one system making up a whole man. His home life is not separable from his work life and his emotional condition is not separate from his physical condition. Hence for good industrial relations it is not enough that the worker's factory life alone should be taken care of his off-the-job conditions should also be improved to make the industrial relations better.

Enlightened Trade Unions – The most important condition necessary for good industrial relations is a strong and enlightened labor movement which may help to promote the status of labor without harming the interests of management, Unions should talk of employee contribution and responsibility. Unions should exhort workers to produce more, persuade management to pay more, mobilize public opinion on vital labor issues and help Government to enact progressive labor laws.

Negotiating skills and attitudes of management and workers – Both management and workers' representation in the area of industrial relations come from a great variety of backgrounds in terms of training, education, experience and attitudes. These varying backgrounds play a major role in shaping the character of industrial relations. Generally speaking, well-trained and experienced negotiators who are motivated by a desire for industrial peace create a bargaining atmosphere conducive to the writing of a just and equitable collective agreement. On the other hand, ignorant, inexperienced and ill-trained persons fail because they do not recognize that collective bargaining is a difficult human activity which deals as much in the emotions of people as in their economic interests.

III. CONCLUSION

From the research it was noticed that industrial relations is the basis of higher production with minimum cost and higher profits in any organization or company. Good industrial relations reduce the industrial disputes; reduce complex problems of modern industrial society. Industrial progress is impossible without cooperation of labors and harmonious relationships. Industrial Relations is a concept that describes a mutual relationship between employees and their employers at the work place.

However, it is better to create and maintain good relations between employees (labor) and employers (management). An effective industrial relation results in the increase of the productivity of the organization.

The absence of industrial relations in the work place can lead to industrial conflicts, distorted corporate

image, dysfunctional industrial processes and failure of organizations to continue to exist or improve upon their productivity.

The organization has adopted a better kind of welfare activities which create an effective working environment and thus better productivity. There is different kind of welfare schemes like medical allowance; death relief fund, insurance, housing and transportation facilities, recreation club etc. are provided by the company to the employees to maintain the industrial relation better one.

To achieve better industrial relations (employees, employers and the government and unions) should provide conducive environment through collective bargaining for employees and their employers to co-exist for corporate efficiency, effectiveness, and enhanced productivity. This will eliminate the existence of social challenges arising from lack of and poor implementation of industrial relations practices in organizations, mainly the oil and gas companies in the Bonny, Nigeria.

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