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## **INDUSTRIAL CONFLICT AND COLLECTIVE BARGAINING: EVIDENCE FROM NORTH CENTRAL REGION OF NIGERIA**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Industrial conflicts in organizations are inevitable due to disagreement between the employees and employers which can either benefit or harm the organization. For the efficacy of the employer, there should be very positive ties between employer and workers. This study therefore, focuses on the use of collective bargaining as an effective instrument for management of conflict in Store Product Research Institute, in the north central of Nigeria. The study made use of pluralist theory as frameworks and employs both qualitative and quantitative research techniques. The findings of the study shows that negotiating via the process of collective bargaining on the terms and conditions of employments were not satisfied to the employees in the way the management of the institution handle them. Therefore, a proactive collective bargaining procedural and substance rules are recommended for both parties to reach collective agreement.*

**Key words:** Industrial conflict, employer and worker relationship, Labour

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The workplace is composed of different values, beliefs and attitudinal behaviour of both employers and employees. The employee is the engine room of any organisation and plays a strategic position in production process and profit making. However, in order for workers to perform effectively and efficiently there must be a strong union between workers and the organisation managers (Chen, Chen & Chen, 2018). It should be noticed that irrespective of the relationship of social elements in work

organisations, conflicts are inevitable because there are inherent competing interest either in wages or terms and condition of service workers (Tom & Shepherd, 2017). In Nigeria industrial sectors today, conflicts and union disputes has consumed a lot of time and human hours waste. This situation hampered the growth and processes of many organisations in Nigeria (Ojielo, 2002). Likewise, in Nigeria studies have stressed that low income and high unemployment rate remained macroeconomic problems despite various attempts by the policy makers (Asaleye, Isoha, Asamu, Inegbedion, Arisukwu & Popoola, 2018; Asaleye, Adama & Ogunjobi, 2018). Therefore, effective management of industrial conflict can help not to worsen the unemployment situation in Nigeria.

Most conflict between management and their workers often start as mere grievances; and when it cannot be handled, it result into strike action, slow work, workplace sabotage, high labour turnover, low morale, absenteeism, loss of human energy, decreased job satisfaction, low productivity and host other effects that are detrimental to work organisations. With increase in diversity, conflict in the workplace cannot be ruled out, even with the presence of labour union. Conflict between ownership of the organisations and the workers is known as industrial conflict. Industrial conflict is the discord that occurs when the goals and values of different individuals or groups are incompatible and antagonistic to each other (Asamu, 2015). However, when industrial conflicts occur constantly, it sires room for strike. Strike eventually forces employers to concede to employees demand. Most times, strike actions are used to change the structure of bargaining and to win substantive demand by workers. Collective bargaining is therefore seen as a process of meeting, presenting demands, discussing, presenting counter proposals and sometimes bullying and threatening, all a bid to reach an agreement.

Theoretically, there is no model that fully explains how collective bargaining should be used in the presence of conflict; this is due to the complexity involved (McCarter et al, 2018; Lv, Li & Tang, 2017). By nature, collective bargaining is usually a complicated time- consuming and exasperating exercise. The ultimate goal of any negotiation is the agreement which may not necessary resolve all the issues in dispute. However, deliberate refused to honour collective agreement arrived through the consensual process of collective bargaining are rife among employers and management representative of some public organisation when processes like these are jettisoned, resulted into information gaps and worsen the situation (Feicht, Grimm, Rau & Stephan, 2017).

In view of the above, the relationship between employees and their employers is not deprived of conflict. However, collective bargaining is the tools used to resolve amicably contending labour issues between employees and employer. The current democratic regimes in Nigeria have witnessed series of industrial conflicts than ever before because of their inability to pay employees as at when due. In this vein, this study investigates the relationship between industrial conflict and collective bargaining process in store product research institute in Nigeria.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

On conceptualizing industrial conflict and collective Bargaining, union and management interest are different from each other as a result of this, they continue to have conflict in the work place. Industrial conflict is view as the disagreement of interest which results into discontentment of different degree between employers and employees in the workplace. Chen et al (2018) opined industrial conflict as the failure of employers and employees to reach agreement which may eventually lead to industrial strikes, lockout or other forms of protestation. Industrial conflict does not necessarily directly affect the actors in an industry but rather it often makes the actors to impose sanctions so as to inflict economic pain on each, in order to achieve their demand. In case of the workers there are various economic sanctions that will bring employers down in other for them to achieve their objective. These economic sanctions include, picketing, rag wearing, overtime ban, strike, blacklisting, work-to-rule etc. but 'strike' remains the most visible weapon used by workers. Alternatively, the employers making use of 'lock-out, dismissal, suspension, no-work no-pay among others to inflict pain on the workers during trade dispute (Imiafidoh, 2006). According to this perspective, industrial conflict is not necessarily dysfunctional but rather depends on how it can be managed by the parties concerned. Collective bargaining is also defined as negotiations about working conditions and terms of employment between an employers, a group of employers or one or more employer's organisations and one or more representative of workers' organisation with a view to reaching agreement (Liu, Lv, Li & Tang, 2017).

Theoretically, different models have been advanced to show the relationship between collective bargaining and conflict in an organisation. McCarter et al (2018) review five models of intragroup conflict in management studies. The scholars concluded that despite the fact that the models have made significant effects in contributions on how to manage conflicts in the society, there is still a need to develop another model due the complexity of the human behaviour. In a similar study, Liu, Lv, Li and Tang (2017) examined the role of bargaining model of labour in relation to disputes and social mediation bounded rationality. It was documented by the scholars that final result of labour dispute did not only associated on the different model advanced. However, there are certain features that need to be put into considerations, among include the 'path dependence'. It was concluded by the scholars that a solution that benefit the society can be reached by taking advantage of social mediation.

The Pluralist theory shows the relationship and roles between employment and industrial relation (Budd, Gomez & Meltz, 2004; Commons, 1957; Flanders, 1965). According to this theory, employment relationship is regarded as a bargaining problem which depends on the distribution of resources as well as the rules governing the interactions between employers and the employees. Due to this effect, the introduction of labour union, public policies and relevant institutions can help to eliminate or reduce conflict in the society. Central to this argument is the role of collective bargaining in industrial conflict. Empirically, Chen, Chen and Chen (2018) investigated the role of collective bargaining against unionized workers in the strategic choice of method payment in corporate acquisitions. The findings of the scholars showed that there is a significant positive relationship between union power and cash payment. Also, the association of the relationship is strengthen more when the firm is located in states without the right-to-work law. Consequently, the study by Feicht, Grimm, Rau and Stephan (2017) examined the impact of quotas and decision rules in collective bargaining. The authors reported that negotiations do not have significant effect if the environment gives insufficient guidance on what to be achieved. Likewise, Tom and Shepherd (2017) analysed the relationship between accounting and social conflict in profit and regulated working time in the British Industrial Revolution. Their findings show that the cost behaviour in most time is used to increase or decrease the apparent effects of reduced working time on profit.

The general picture from the conceptual, theoretical and empirical perspectives is that each party either employer or employee aimed at maximising benefits which results to conflict. Though, elements of complexity are involved due to complexity, the collective bargaining is one of the methods identified to improve the situation. In recent times in Nigeria, different organisation conflicts had emerged with resulted to retrenchment of employment. High unemployment, poverty rate and low income rate are some of the macroeconomic issues in the country (Fashina, Asaleye, Ogunjobi & Lawal, 2018; Oloni, Asaleye, Abiodun & Adeyemi, 2017). Likewise, most studies in Nigeria have focused on the banking industries and state government workers. This study, however, investigates the relationship between industrial conflict and collective bargaining process in store product research institute in Nigeria.

### **3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1. Theoretical Framework**

Pluralist theory is adopted as theoretical framework for this study. This perspective attempts to apply the analogy of pluralism in society where there are diverse socio-cultural group, which compete for scarce resource, for instance power. This diversity could be in terms of ethnicity, religious affiliation, social class, political orientation among others. If in the society these diverse aspects are allowed to interfere in our everyday life, they are going to bring about: sectionalism, squabbling and conflict which could even tear society apart. In the same way work place is made of individual and groups who are also divers. To harmonize these diversities and pluralism, there must be some mechanism at work which will bring the competing groups together and hold them back from tearing the work place into pieces. This mechanism should be a continuous process of concession and compromise. Collective bargaining is seen as the mechanism for achieving this while the employer and trade unionism represent these interests for those in the work place that engage in collective bargaining (Budd, Gomez & Meltz, 2004; Commons, 1957; Dunlop, 1958; Flanders, 1965).

This perspective also argues that the legitimacy and justification of trade union in the relationship rest upon their success, real or supposed. To be recognize, to engage in collective bargaining, to achieve the objectives of their work place is a reflection of diverse interest group in the work place, as well as power relations between these interested groups. The theory is relevant in the sense that organizations have different ideology; goals that they want to achieve As a result, labour union becomes the legitimate representatives of employees in the workplace. Thus, the system of industrial relation gets grounded on the product of discontentment and compromises between management and labour union. Pluralist theory to industrial conflict is contend that just as the society seen as a coalition of various interest groups held together in balance by the state agency, so is industrial and work organisation are seen as being held balance, by the management agency. Labour unions are seen as legitimate representatives of workers' interest at workplace with the right to challenge management prerogative. The perspective considers as the central features of industrial relation; the potential conflict which exist between management and the managed within the work enterprise.

However, labour union is seen as both representing the interest of the employees and as well playing important role in regulating this conflict. Similarly, collective bargaining is recognised as being the organisational avenue by which conflict in industry is controlled and regularized. The theory therefore considers industrial conflict as being not only inevitable but more important requiring containment within the socio-mechanism of collective bargaining. This theory will be appropriate for this study in analysing the industrial conflict and collective bargaining process in Nigeria Store Product Research Institute because the theory is easy to visualised industrial relation as a process of balancing power among overlapping economics, social, ethnic and geographical groupings.

#### 4. METHODOLOGY

The survey research design was used to collect data from sampled population through the adoption of questionnaire and interview methods. The study population is 1,203 staff which consists of the management and academic and non-academic staff unions in Nigeria Store Product Research Institute under the federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Ilorin, Kwara state. The Nigerian Stored Products Research Institutes (NSPRI) was established in 1954 to conduct research in all aspects of harvest handling of agricultural crops and their products, pesticide development, residue analysis and mycotoxin surveys on food items in Nigeria as stated in Decree 5 of 1977. The research method use forty per cent of the total population as sample size summing up to 480 staff selected through stratified sampling. Questionnaires were administered on 480 staff. The administration of research instruments took cognizance of the strata namely management and junior staff, Academics and non-academic staff unions which spread across all departments.

#### 5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

##### 5.1. Presentation of Results

##### 5.1.1. Personal Information of the Respondent

This section represents the personal information of management and workers in Nigeria store product Research Institute, Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria.

##### 5.1.2. Personal Data of Respondents

**Table 1:** Distribution of Respondents According to their Socio Economic Characteristics

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Age</b>		
20 – 30 years	48	10.0
31 – 40 years	208	43.3
41 – 50 years	156	32.5
50 years and above	68	14.2
<b>Total</b>	480	100

Sex		
Male	352	73.3
Female	128	26.7
Total	480	100
Marital Status		
Single	116	24.2
Married	348	72.5
Widow/Widower	12	2.5
Divorce	4	0.8
Total	480	100
Year of Employment		
Less than 1 year	52	10.8
1 – 5 years	152	31.7
6 – 10 years	88	18.3
Over 10 years	188	39.2
Total	480	100
Educational Qualification		
WAEC	36	7.5
BSc./HND	404	84.2
Others	40	8.3
Total	480	100

Source: Author's Field Survey, 2017

Table 1 reveals that 48 about 10.0 per cent of the 480 respondents used in this study are within the age group 20-30. Similarly, 208 about 43.3 per cent are within the age group 31-40, Then 156 approximately 32.5 per cent are within the age group of 41-50, while 68 per cent around 14.2 per cent are above 50 years of age. This shows that majority of respondents used for this study are within age bracket of 31-40. It can be deduced that the active labour force are in the organization, this set of age are active in union participation. Meanwhile, 73.3 percent of the respondents are males while 26.7 per cent are females from the distribution, it can be infer that male dominated the organization making their opinion viewed compared to the female respondents. Also, table 1 indicated that 75.5 per cent of the respondents are married, 24.2 percent the total respondents are single. In addition, years of employment was measured 10.8 percent of the respondents have employed for less than a year. 31.7 per cent were employed for period of 1-5 years, 18.3 percent of the respondents were employed between 6-10 years. While those employed for over 10 years above measured 39.2 percent. On educational qualification, the respondents with WAEC and equivalent 7.5 per cent of the total respondents, 84.2 percent of the respondents claimed they BSc and HND, while 8.3 have others like college of education certificate and primary school leaving certificate.

### 5.1.3. Industrial Conflict and collection bargaining process

This sub-section deals with causes of industrial conflict, issues of negotiation for collection bargaining and machinery uses for effective collective bargaining process.

**Table 2** Causes of Industrial conflict in Nigeria Store Product Research Institute

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Workers satisfaction</b>		
Satisfied	184	38.3
Not satisfied	296	61
<b>Free Hand of union</b>		
Yes	372	77.5
No	84	17.5
Undecided	24	5.0
<b>Root of Conflicts</b>		
Delay in payment of Salary	20	4.2
Exclusion from decision making	140	29.2
Delay in promotion	248	51.7

<b>Ineffective communication</b>	72	15.0
<b>Discontentment</b>		
<b>Strikes</b>	86	71.7
<b>Boycott</b>	18	15
<b>Picketing</b>	16	13.3

Source: Authors survey, 2017

The table presents the causes of industrial conflict in Nigeria store product research institute. From the table, it can be depicted that majority of the respondents with about 61.7 per cent said they are not satisfied with the condition of the services in the institution. However, 38.3 per cent of the respondents are satisfied with the institution condition of the service. This implies that the workers in the institution are not satisfied with their conditions of the services. On the union operation, about 77.5 per cent of the respondents said ‘Yes’ that the trade union in the institute are given free hands to carry out their union activities, 17.5 per cent said ‘No’ while 5.0 per cent were undecided on this. On the root of conflict, 4.2 per cent of the respondents in this study said delay in payment of salary could bring industrial conflict, while, majority 51.17 per cent agreed that unfair labour practices could bring industrial conflict, also 29.2 per cent said non- involvement of workers in decision making, while the rest about 15.0 per cent said ineffective communication bring about conflict in the institution. On the organizational discontentment, 71.7 per cent of the respondents in this research said that trade union express conflict through strikes, also, 15 per cent express through boycott while 13.3 per cent said that trade union express conflict through picketing. The table reveals that trade union mostly used strike action to express conflict in the organisation. Also, unfair labour practices are the main causes of industrial conflict.

**Table 3** Issues of Negotiation for collective bargaining

Issues of Negotiation	Response			
	Not Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Very Satisfactory	Total
	Frequency (Percentage)	Frequency (Percentage)	Frequency (Percentage)	Frequency (Percentage)
<b>Wages</b>	240 (50.0)	168 (35.0)	72 (15.0)	480 (100)
<b>Hours of Works</b>	54 (11.3)	177 (36.9)	249 (51.9)	480 (100)
<b>Work loads</b>	284 (59.2)	168 (35.0)	28 (5.8)	480 (100)
<b>Layoff and Recalls</b>	80 (16.7)	328 (68.3)	72 (15.0)	480 (100)
<b>Holiday and Annual leave</b>	24 (5.0)	48 (10.0)	408 (85.0)	480 (100)
<b>Gratitude and Pension</b>	352 (73.3)	56 (11.7)	72 (15.0)	480 (100)
<b>Health Benefits</b>	328 (68.3)	72 (15.0)	80 (16.7)	480 (100)
<b>Housing Benefits</b>	272 (56.6)	128 (26.7)	80 (16.7)	480 (100)

Source: Author’s survey

The table 3 indicates some of the issues of negotiation through its use of collective bargaining. In respect to the issues on wages, majority of the respondents 50 per cent responded they were not satisfied with the wages despite the negotiation through collective bargaining, in this case 15 per cent of the respondents claimed they are very satisfied. On the hours of work, majority of the respondents indicated that they were very satisfied with the hours they worked with the institute. Only about 11.3 percent respondents indicated they were not satisfied with the hours of their works. On the workloads, it shown that the majority of the respondents 59.2 per cent said they were not satisfy with their workloads. When interviewed, some of them said the institute heeds to employ more workers. On the layoff and recalls of employees, a high number of the respondents 68.3 per cent were satisfied on how negotiation through collective bargaining brought their members back after strike action. In addition, response on the issues on holiday and annual leave were measured, the results shows that higher number of respondents 85 per cent claimed they were very satisfactory with the holiday and annual leave given to them by the institute. Also the issues of gratitude and pension were considered, the result reveals that majority of the respondents 73.3 per cent indicated that they were not satisfied. Penultimate, the health benefits issue

was measured; majority of the respondents 68.3 per cent said that they were not satisfactory after negotiation through collective bargaining. Finally more than half of the respondents 56.6 per cent were not satisfied with the housing fit after negotiation through collective bargaining process.

**Table 4** The Machinery for effective Collective Bargaining

Statement	Response					
	SD	D	SA	A	UD	TOTAL
	Freq. (Per cent)	Freq. (Per cent)	Freq. (Per cent)	Freq. (Per cent)	Freq. (Per cent)	Total (Per cent)
<b>Collective bargaining built upon voluntary principle.</b>	36 (7.5)	136 (28.3)	128 (26.7)	96 (20.0)	84 (17.5)	480 (100)
<b>The union has to do some homework in getting facts and figure to support the demand being made</b>	24 (5.0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	224 (46.7)	232 (48.3)	480 (100)
<b>Good presentation is very crucial as this could make or mark the demand.</b>	24 (5.0)	0 (0)	20 (4.2)	204 (42.5)	232 (48.3)	480 (100)
<b>An effective preparation for negotiation should be able to address the issues of when, who, how and what.</b>	24 (5.0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	180 (37.5)	276 (57.5)	480 (100)
<b>The effectiveness or otherwise of collective bargaining will depend on bargaining power of both parties.</b>	24 (5.0)	28 (5.8)	0 (0)	180 (37.5)	248 (51.6)	480 (100)
<b>*SD, D, SA, A and UD represent strongly disagreed, disagreed, strongly agreed, agreed and undecided respectively</b>						

Sources: Researcher’s Fieldwork, 2017

Table 4 deals with machinery put in place for effective collective bargaining. Five items were measured; the first one shows whether the collective bargaining in Nigeria store product research institute is built upon voluntary principle. The result indicates that 7.5 per cent were strongly in disagreed, 28.3 per cent disagreed, 26.7 per cent agreed, while 20 per cent were undecided. From this, it can be concluded that majority of the respondent claimed that collective bargaining in the institute is not built upon voluntary principle. The majority of the respondents with 46.7 per cent and 5 per cent agreed and strongly disagreed respectively completely on the statement “in preparation of the demand”, the union has to do some homework in setting facts and figure to support the demand being made. On the statement if good presentation in very crucial as this could make or mark demand majority of the respondents, 42.5 per cent agreed. Penultimately, the statement on effective preparation for negotiation should be able to address the issues of where, who, how and what. In this case 37.5 per cent agreed with the statement. Finally, and in all 37.5 per cent of the respondents agreed that the effectiveness or otherwise of machinery put in place for collective bargaining which supposed to depend on bargaining power of both parties in negotiation.

## 6. DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

In this study conducted on industrial conflict and collective bargaining process using Nigeria store product research institute as focus. It was first observed that the causes of industrial conflict in the institution ranges from employees not satisfied with the condition of service, such as delay in payment of salary and promotion, noninvolvement of workers in decision making as well as ineffective communication between management and employees. This is explainable in the sense that insufficient appreciation for the human factor in the work place as shown in the above conditions of service. These express the discontentment of employees and the aggressive of workers in demanding for improved conditions of service. It must be established that the modern days management must fashion out extraordinary approach to tackles the problems of employees’ condition of service through collective bargaining process as conflict settlement. Corroborating this Dunlop (1958) and Flanders (1965) highlight that collective bargaining helped employers and employees secure a better dealt to resolve their grievances.

Consequently, the study revealed there are challenges on the issues of negotiation through the means of collective bargaining. For example, such issues as wages, hours of works, workload, holiday, gratitude and pension, health and housing benefits were not satisfied to the employees in the way the



management of the institution handle them. One of the factors expounding the finding above is the non-participation of Labour Union in the decision making policy of the institute. The fairness of collective bargaining as a tool for conflict settlement is suspected and questionable. This differ with procedural rules of relations by Dunlop (1958) and Flanders (1965) and as a bedrock upon which the collective bargaining process rests in line with the industrial relations system by which the managers of organization and labour union establish and maintain cordial work relations (Elele, 2015).

Finally, on the machinery put in place by the Nigeria store product research institute for effective collective bargaining. It was reiterated by the finding that the effective use of collective bargaining process holds the potential of achieving stability and regularity in the work place through procedural and substantive rules with the objective of ensuring credible mechanism for peaceful resolution of labour conflict. The collective bargaining machinery that is put in place in the institute is not adequately followed. The factor infringes on the workings of procedural rules as a main component in the collective bargaining process. The result of collective bargaining procedure is collective agreement. Reinforcing this statement, the Pluralist theory assumed that if collective bargaining procedure is handled properly, it provides strong opportunity to bring out a feeling of content and unity between employers and employees as it helps in enacting formal set of procedure which will be agreed by both parties.

## 7. CONCLUSION

In recent times in Nigeria, industrial conflicts have been on the increasing trend resulting to increase in unemployment rate and poverty rate. This situation hampered the growth and processes of many organisations. Effective management of industrial conflict can help not to worsen the unemployment situation in Nigeria. However, increase in diversity, conflict in the workplace cannot be ruled out, even with the presence of labour union. Collective bargaining is therefore seen as a process of meeting, presenting demands, discussing, presenting counter proposals and sometimes bullying and threatening, all a bid to reach an agreement. Theoretically, there is no model that fully explains how collective bargaining should be used in the presence of conflict; this is due to the complexity involved. This study adopted the Pluralist theory as a framework, according to the theory; employment relationship is regarded as a bargaining problem which depends on the distribution of resources as well as the rules governing the interactions between employers and the employees. The introduction of labour union, public policies and relevant institutions can help to eliminate or reduce conflict in the society. Essential to this argument is the role of collective bargaining in industrial conflict.

This study shows that collective bargaining is an effective instrument for sorting and reconciling conflicting interests and contracting strength. It can be reiterated that collective bargaining is a rule making process, an effective practice of its processes and machinery holds the promise of maintaining stability in the work environment through substantive and procedural rules and with the aim of ensuring credible mechanism for harmonious labour conflict resolution among its several functions. The study strongly recommended that organizations must always be prepared for the occurrences of industrial conflicts and be able to tolerate and contain them with reasonable bounds. A proactive collective bargaining procedural and substantive rule should be entrenched by employers to often expect and respond to economic developments that affect the terms and conditions of workers. Employers should shy away from breaching upon the rights of employee. Similarly, unions must respect employer's prerogatives. In addition, the rational management team must pay careful attention to removing the sources of potential conflict. To this end it must make sure that employees are involve in decision making and promotion and other conditions of service must be fair and equitable.

It should be noted that collective bargaining would further strengthens labour management relations in the institution of study. Worker education should be introduced to include their education and general orientation on labour management interactive forum, genuine conflict resolution machinery, inter-personal relations and leadership development. This study focused on the role of collective bargaining on industrial conflict. Interaction with the respondents' show that influence of the working environment such as goals to be achieve by the organisation, policies and condition of service are vital issues with can result to harmony or conflict. Though, it was discussed in this work but not extensively. It is recommended that future research should focus more on these factors.



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