
Sustainable Industrial Peace as a Catalyst for African Development: the Nigerian Experience

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Abstract

The incessant occurrence of Industrial Conflict in Nigeria has impacted negatively on its socio-economic development. This is evidenced by general low productivity, loss of man hours, capital flight, depreciation of naira, high inflationary rate and host of others. It is, therefore, the objective of this study to examine the conflict-handling behaviour of labour leaders and management representatives with a view to suggesting behavior modification skills that could be used to enhance the conflict-handling behaviour of the two social actors in order to bring about sustainable industrial peace in the industries. The study adopted dialectical method otherwise known as qualitative descriptive methodology, as it relies solely on documentary empirical evidences as its source of data, using content analysis as its tool. The findings showed that the conflict-handling behaviour being used by the social actors is grossly defective and this is what has largely accounted for the high frequency of industrial conflict in Nigeria. Based on the findings, it was recommended among other things that training programme on some skills such as emotional intelligence, assertiveness skills, interpersonal skills and communication skills be conducted for both labour leaders and management representatives. It is anticipated that training on the identified skills for the two social actors could enhance their conflict-handling behaviour and consequently bring about sustainable industrial peace required for inclusive and integrated development in Nigeria and Africa generally.

Keywords: Conflict-handling Behaviour, Industrial Conflict, Behaviour Modification Skills, Labour Leaders and Management Representatives.

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Background to the Study

Nigeria as a nation has witnessed a high frequency of industrial upheavals in its component units. Almost on daily basis, workers carry out agitation over labour issues ranging from non-payment of salaries, illegal deduction to non-remittance of pension deduction as well as unlawful disengagement of workers especially in the organized private sector. Indeed, industrial action in the form of strike has become endemic so much that no sector is spared. Even in the essential services sectors (e.g. Health and Power) where strike action is legally forbidden industrial action is still prevalent. In the same vein, productive activities have severally been paralyzed in the real sector of Nigerian economy. Honestly, strike action that was once regarded as a “British disease” has become a Nigerian disease.

This unhealthy trend has retarded the desired economic development in the country. Due to the incessant industrial action meaningful productive activities could not take place in the industries. This has resulted to loss of man hours and low foreign direct investment because no foreign investor will be willing to invest in an economy that is bedeviled by high frequency of industrial action.

It is instructive to mention that conflict is not an aberration rather it is an inevitable element in every human grouping and its occurrence is largely due to the pursuit of divergent interests, goals and aspirations by individuals and/or group that made up the social organisation (Otite, 2001). In a typical work organisation for instance, the interest of the employer who invested his hard earned money in business is to maximize profit at minimum cost (including cost of labour) whereas the interest of the employees is to have a lion share of the organizational “cake” in the form higher pay and best conditions of service (Arije, 2000; Omoluabi, 2001; Adewumi, 2002). But despite the radical difference in the interests of the two social actors (employers and employees), conflict is not necessarily dysfunctional rather its outcome depends largely on the way and manner the issue of conflict is handled.

However, some studies (Bankole, 2010; Akanji, 2005; Hammed & Ayantunji, 2002) had traced the breakdown of peace, in the industries to the application of wrong and inappropriate conflict-handling behaviour to operate collective bargaining as machinery for conflict resolution. Collective bargaining as a concept can be described as a negotiation process over the terms and conditions of employment between the employer and the employees (or their representatives) with a view to reaching collective and mutually acceptable agreements (Kester, 2002). In essence, it involves internal arrangement through which industrial conflict is processed and resolved by the two social actors (employer and employees) in an atmosphere of mutual corporation and respects (Bankole, 2010).

From the definition of collective bargaining given above it appears to be a perfect mechanism for conflict resolution. But it should be noted that it is one thing for a machine to be in a perfect state, it is another thing for the operator to possess the technical

knowhow to operate the machine effectively otherwise it may not produce the desired result. And this is the case of operators of collective bargaining in Nigeria. It is the inability of the employers' representatives and the labour leaders to apply the appropriate conflict-handling behaviour to operate the machinery of collective bargaining that has led to many work stoppages arising from trade dispute.

The table below shows at a glance reported cases of work stoppages between 1970-2006 in Nigeria.

Table 1: Industrial Relations Statistics in Nigeria

Year	Trade Dispute	Work Stoppages	Workers Involved	Man-day Lost
1970	165	44	14,784	27,072
1975	775	346	107,487	435,493
1980	355	265	221,088	2,356,998
1981	258	234	323,700	2,218,223
1986	87	53	157,165	461,345
1990	174	102	254,540	1,339,105
1991	204	117	460,471	2,257,382
1992	221	124	238,324	966,611
1993	160	90	880,224	6,192,167
1994	199	110	1,541,146	234,307,748
1995	46	26	193,944	2,269,037
1996	29	24	19,826	94,664
1997	31	31	59,897	359,801
1998	16	11	9,494	47,631
1999	52	27	173,858	3,158,087
2000	49	47	344,722	6,287,733
2001	51	37	259,290	4,722,910
2002	50	42	302,006	5,505,322
2003	149	669	162,199	4,518,321
2004	152	152	517,331	3,302,112
2005	155	489	872,463	2,086,903
2006	46	112	86,342	2,446,055

Sources: (i) CBN Statistical Bulletin Vol.17 (2006)

(ii) Federal Ministry of Employment Labour and Productivity.

Objectives of the Study

The study examines the available conflict-handling behaviours with a view to identifying the most appropriate one and suggesting some generic behaviour modification skills that could be used to enhance the conflict-handling behaviour of the two social actors and consequently bring about sustainable industrial peace that can engender integrated development in Nigeria and by extension in Africa.

Statement of Problem

The incidence of industrial conflict in Nigeria has apparently impacted negatively on its socio-economic and technological development. However, the trend has been traced to conflict-handling behaviour of labour leaders and management representatives who are the operators of collective bargaining as machinery for conflict resolution (Hammed, 2002; Bankole, 2010). It is against this background that this paper examines some of the

available conflict-handling behaviour and thereafter suggests some behaviour modification skills that could be used to enhance the conflict-handling behaviour of the two social actors in order to bring about sustainable industrial peace required to attain inclusive and integrated development not only in Nigeria but Africa in general.

Theoretical Framework

Theories are underlying assumptions tested and accepted as the basis of explanation for observed relationship in a given circumstance. The theory on which this paper is anchored is Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977). The assumption of this theory is that aggression is not innate or instinctual rather it is actually learned through the process of socialization. The theory argues further that aggressive behavior cannot be explained by stimulus-response operations alone rather it is a function of socialization process to which individual is exposed. The relevance of this theory to this paper is that undesirable conflict-handling behaviour of the two social actor that have been implicated for the high frequency of industrial conflict in Nigeria can be unlearned while the desirable conflict-handling behaviour learned through the same social learning process (e.g. intervention training programme) as advocated by the theory.

Methodology

The paper adopts dialectical method otherwise known as qualitative descriptive methodology as it relies exclusively on documentary empirical evidences as its source of data, using content analysis as its tools.

Conflict- Handling Behaviour: Concept, Types and Functions

The operators of the machinery of collective bargaining are the labour leaders (representing the employees) and the management representatives (representing the employers). The two social actors seem to lack the requisite conflict management skills; hence they have always applied the wrong conflict- handling behavior to operate the machine.

Essentially, conflicts are handled in a variety of ways and models have been developed to demonstrate the various available types of conflict-handling behaviour. For example, there is a two-dimensional model of conflict-handling behavior, which originated from the work of Blake and Mouton (1964) but was expanded by Thomas and Kilmann (1974) who identified two conceptually independent dimensions of interpersonal behaviours namely: Assertiveness and Co-operativeness.

Assertiveness: It implies that an individual has high concern for himself and low concern for others. In essence, it shows the extent to which an individual attempts to satisfy his own needs and interest at the expense of others. On the other hand, Co-operativeness implies that an individual has high concern for himself and for others. In other words, he considers his interest alongside the interest of others. Based on the framework of Thomas and Kilmann (1974), Mitchell (2002) described five conflict-handling behaviours by which the negotiation process of collective bargaining can be approached namely:

Competing, Accommodating, Avoiding, Compromising and Collaborating

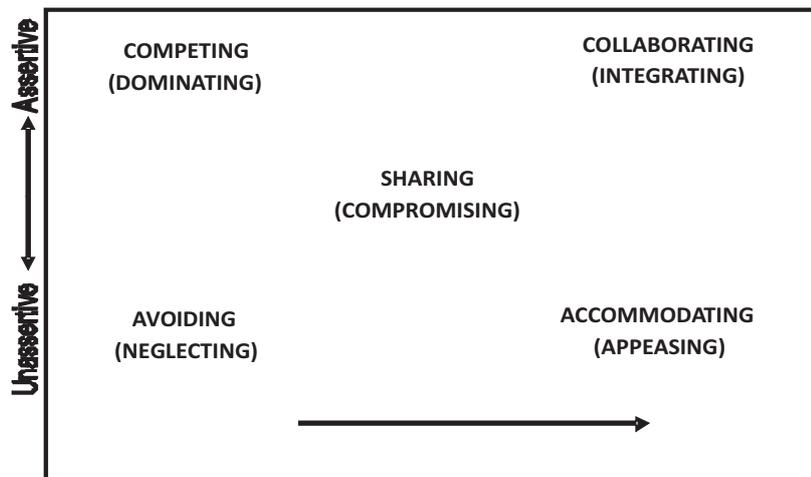
But before delving into each of the above listed conflict-handling behaviours, it is imperative to explain what conflict-handling behavior as a concept depicts.

Conflict-handling Behavior

It is an individual's behavioural pattern, approach or orientation regarding how conflict should be handled with the other party in conflict (Hammed, 2002; Ogunyemi, 2005). This implies that the conflict-handling behaviour of the conflicting parties is crucial to the outcome of the conflict management process (Hammed and Ayantunji, 2002).

Perhaps, it is important to mention very quickly that the type of conflict - handling behavior an individual exhibits is predicated on his perception of other party in conflict (Mitchell, 2006; Kilman, 2007). Perception refers to how a person sees, understands, or interprets the situation around him/her. For instance, the perception of some labour leaders about their employers in Nigeria is that employers are workers' "enemies" who are only interested in exploiting the workers to maximize profit at minimum cost. Based on this perception, labour leaders who are workers' representatives regard employer of labour as somebody who is not willing to concede to the "reasonable" demands of workers until he is compelled to do so via strike action (Kester et al 2006). It is on this basis that labour leaders in Nigeria tend to be hostile and unnecessarily aggressive to management representatives during negotiation as evidenced in their use of intuitive words, banging of table during negotiation or outright walkout on the management (Fajana, 2006).

On the other hand, some employers of labour too (through management representatives) consider workers as bunch of ungrateful elements who are never contented with offers given to them irrespective of how bountiful the offers may be. Thus, they (management representatives) tend to intimidate, cow and victimize labour leaders who are in the vanguard of labour struggle during and after strike action. It is obvious that with the scenario presented above, it may be pretty difficult if not practically impossible to attain sustainable industrial peace that can engender economic development for Nigeria in particular and by extension Africa in general. This is because for as long as the mutual mis-perception of intents of the two social actors persist, inappropriate conflict -handling behaviour would consistently be applied and industrial peace will remain elusive in the industries. Suffice it to say that no meaningful economic and productive activity can take place in a turbulent industrial environment where strike action is prevalent. A graphic presentation of the model of conflict-handling behaviour is given below:



Source: Metchel, R. C. (2002).

<http://www.csun.edu/~hfmgt001/cmgp.htm> 10/25/2006

Competing

This approach explains that a party in conflict tries to satisfy its own interest and disregard other party's interest. It shows an unwillingness to satisfy the other party (s) interest even to a minimal degree. Thus, it represents a desire to defeat the other party and presents a win-lose situation. This style could be likened to “winner takes all” or “zero sum game” kind of orientation. Hence, it does not promote peace between the conflicting parties instead it escalates the dispute. This method is considered to be effective but not appropriate (Gross and Guerrero, 2000).

Accommodating

This is a corollary of competing approach. Individual that adopts this method demonstrate a willingness to cooperate in satisfying other party interest even at his own expense. The user of this style easily gives in to others hence he is seen to be highly flexible, willing to accede to the other party's demands and shift his own position on the issue. Though this method could be considered appropriate because it promotes harmonious relationship between the parties, it is ineffective because the interest of the user suffers most time.

Avoiding

This approach refers to a situation where an individual withdraws from conflict situation probably as a result of perceived injustice or discrimination. The user of this approach tries to avoid the other person or pretend that the conflict does not exist even when the individual is hurt or angry. Thus, the approach does not solve the problem but simply postpones the evil day. Hence, it leaves the parties feeling more hurt, frustrated, annoyed, angry and resentful. Though, the approach may not be said to be completely negative or dysfunctional because some situations may arise where avoidance can be used as a stop-gap to reflect on what next line of action to be taken. This approach is

generally perceived to be inappropriate and ineffective because it depicts a situation of low concern for self and for others (Gross and Guerrero, 2000).

Compromising

This approach involves give and take or sharing whereby both parties in conflict sacrifice for a mutually acceptable decision. It involves finding an expedient, neutrally acceptable solution which partially satisfies both sides. It is an integrative approach to conflict handling. This approach is considered to be moderately effective and moderately appropriate because it seeks a quick middle-ground position.

Collaborating

This involves high concern for one's interest and for the interest of other party(s). This approach is also known as Joint Problem Solving (JPS) because it presents a situation in which parties to a conflict/dispute find solutions to their problem in a cordial environment (Albert, 2001). Thus, the approach is non-judgmental and highly participatory in nature. It promotes cooperation between the parties in conflict who jointly analyses the structure of the conflict and carefully work out strategies for reconciling their differences. The approach essentially enables the parties to listen to each other, discuss the issues together, understand the conflict and attack the issues and not the personalities involved. By so doing, the approach promotes win-win situation. It is therefore, considered to be the most appropriate and most effective approach to manage conflicts (Gross and Guerrero, 2000). The study of Yu et al (2006) lends credence to this position when it stated that if managers want to be effective at managing conflict, they must espouse and develop an integrative (that is, collaborating) style. It is deduced from the analysis given so far on the five conflict handling behaviour that collaborating conflict-handling behaviour is the most appropriate and most effective approach that can engender the desired sustainable industrial peace required to attain inclusive and integrated development not only in Nigeria but in Africa generally.

Unfortunately, it has been observed empirically that the collaborating approach is seldom adopted by both labour leaders and management representatives who are the operators of collective bargaining as machinery for conflict resolution. This explains why there has always been industrial upheaval in our industries. The table below shows the frequency in percentage of the use of the five conflict-handling behaviour by labour leaders and management representatives in an empirical study carried out on 1,015 respondents comprising 610 labour leaders and 405 management representatives in 2010 in Nigeria:

Conflict-Handling Behaviour	Labour Leaders		Management Representatives		Total	
	No	%	No	%	No	%
Competing	395	64.8	102	25.2	497	48.97
Collaborating	74	12.1	68	16.8	142	13.99
Compromising	121	19.8	232	57.3	353	34.78
Accommodating	15	2.5	02	0.5	17	1.69
Avoiding	05	0.8	01	0.3	06	0.59
Total	610	100	405	100	1015	100

Source: Bankole, A. R. (2010).

Psychosocial factors as determinants of conflict-handling behaviour of labour leaders and management representatives in Lagos State, Nigeria. PhD Thesis, University of Ibadan, Ibadan.

From the above table, it is shown that labour leaders have preference for Competing (64.8%) while management representatives embrace Compromising (57.3%) as their primary conflict-handling behaviour.

Behaviour Modification Skills: Their Applicability to Conflict- Handling Behaviour

Meanwhile, some recent studies (Fajana, 2009; Bankole, 2010) have discovered generic behavioural modification skills that could be used to positively influence the behaviour of the two social actors and possibly make them adopt a more appropriate approach during negotiation process.

Among the numerous behaviour modification skills identified, four that appear relevant and that can enhance the conflict-handling behaviour of the two social actors were isolated and their relevance to conflict management process was examined. They are: Emotional Intelligence, Assertiveness Skills, Interpersonal Skills and Communication Skills.

Emotional Intelligence

It is the ability to accurately identify, understand and regulate one's own emotional reactions and those of others with a view to making good decisions and acting effectively (Fajana 2009). Goleman (1998) who popularized the concept of emotional intelligence identified five (5) basic components of the concept based on the framework of Salovey and Mayer (1990). The components are: Self-awareness, motivation, empathy and social skills. Goleman (1998) argued that emotional intelligence is twice as valuable as technical skills and intelligent quotient for jobs at all levels, adding that a person's success at workplace is 80 percent dependent on emotional intelligence and 20 percent dependent on intelligent quotients because it is the skill that enables him get along with others. Thus, the fame of intelligence quotient is fast reducing under the compelling influence of emotional intelligence in most workplace world over (Aremu, 2007; Fajana 2009). The applicability of the concept to negotiation process is that if the two parties could understand and regulate their emotional reactions, they could be able to get along and arrive at mutually acceptable solution to their conflicting issue(s) (Bankole, 2010).

Assertiveness Skill

It is the ability to express one's feelings and assert one's rights while respecting the feelings and rights of others (Elizabeth – Scott, 2007). It involves the direct expression of feelings in a socially acceptable manner (Hammed, 1999). It is a skill that enables a person to be more confident and develop the right interpersonal skills to relate well with others (Akinade and Adedipe, 2004). Though, assertiveness comes naturally to some, it is a skill that can be learned (Spearhead Gulf, 2007). People who have mastered the skill of assertiveness are able to reduce drastically the level of interpersonal conflict in their relationship with others (Elizabeth – Scott, 2007).

It is common knowledge that people confuse aggressiveness with assertiveness, seeing that both types of behavior involves standing up for one's right and expressing one's needs. Nevertheless, there is a radical difference between the two concepts. Individual behaving assertively will express themselves in a way that does not attack or insult other person. Assertive person assumes the best about people, respect them, and think win-win and even try to compromise. Thus, it is peculiar with assertive person to face problems promptly by focusing on solutions rather than problems (Head Injury Hotline, 1998; Bankole, 2009). The behaviours of assertive persons, therefore, are designed to promote communication and problem solving which are the virtues that trade union leaders and management representatives need to improve on their conflict-handling behaviour in order to maintain reasonable level of industrial peace in the industries, which is one of the requirements to attain inclusive and integrated development in Africa as a whole.

In contrast, individuals behaving aggressively tend to employ tactics that are disrespectful, manipulative, demeaning or abusive. Such individuals make negative assumption about the motives of others and think in retaliatory terms. Individuals with aggressive mode of behaviour don't think of the other person's views instead they insist that their own views, feelings and needs supersede that of others. Aggressive mode of behaviour, obviously, does not resolve conflict rather it exacerbates the conflicting situation.

Communication Skill

Human beings have many roles (such as parents, workers, labour leaders, etc) to play in life, but in all the roles, there is one skill that people use extensively all through their life time, and that is communication skill (Bankole, 2014). It is a very important aspect of one's personality because it helps to build good relationship with others.

As a concept, communication skill is the process of conceptualizing, codifying and passing information from one person to another and the manifestation of a feedback from the receiver signifying understanding of the message in whole or part (Johnson, 2001). Some of the past studies had pointed out the central position of communication skill in the management of conflict. For example, Adepoju (1998) affirmed that a clear and comprehensive communication is fundamental to effective conflict management. He argued that without good communication, problem cannot be understood let alone gets the conflict arising from the problem resolved. Ajala (2003) lends credence to the position of Adepoju (1998) when he presented communication skill as one of the skills to be acquired in Peace Education for effective conflict resolution.

Suffice it to say that without communication skills, effective communication cannot be achieved. It is this fact that underscores that importance of communication skills in conflict management process. Folarin (1992) corroborated this assertion when he said communication skill helps to clear doubts, temper hard feelings, eliminate embarrassment and ultimately sustain industrial peace at workplace. In line with Folarin (1992) Southam (2006) described communication skills as comprising literacy, verbal

skills and listening skills, which are the factors that facilitate conflict management process. In a nutshell, it has been established that communication skills plays a vital role as far as conflict management is concerned, hence the absence of communication skill can affect negatively the conflict-handling behaviour of the two social actors.

Interpersonal Skill

It is the ability to read and manage the emotions, motivations and behaviour of oneself and others during social interactions or in a social interactive context with a view to reaching certain effects or results (Young 1996; Wikipedia, 2006). In essence, it is a skill required for working peacefully with others conveying verbal and non-verbal messages, listening, giving and receiving feedback, communicating with diverse others and overcoming barriers to communication (Bankole, 2009). It has been established that without interpersonal skills, the most positive and confident employee or leader may not accomplish much at workplace because everyone needs interpersonal skill to communicate and function co-operatively with others in a work group (Okurame, 2000).

In view of the fact that interpersonal skills of people influence what they say and how they say it, it can be inferred that the development of interpersonal values will enhance the conflict handling behaviour of labour leaders and management representatives and consequently reduce the occurrence of industrial conflict thereby giving room for more productive activities that will engender inclusive and integrative development not only in Nigeria but Africa generally.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In response to the empirical evidences that implicated the conflict-handling behaviour of both labour leaders and management representatives for the high frequency of industrial action in Nigeria, this study examined the five types of conflict-handling behaviour as presented by Mitchell (2002) and consequently identified collaborating as the most effective and appropriate based on the feature of each of them. Thereafter, four behaviour modification skills (emotional intelligence, interpersonal skills, assertiveness and communication skills) that are crucial to individual behavioural pattern were isolated and examined to establish the fact that effective use of the skills could enhance the conflict-handling behaviour of the two social actors and also bring about sustainable industrial peace required for inclusive and integrated development.

Based on the analysis of this paper and relying on the social learning theory on which this paper is anchored, it is recommended that intervention training programme on the four identified behaviour modification skills be conducted regularly for the two social actors of the industrial relations system. By so doing, it is envisaged that the conflict-handling behaviour of the actors would be improved upon, leading to sustainable industrial peace needed to achieve inclusive and integrated development in Nigeria and by extension in Africa. It is also suggested that employers of labour should always carry along the leadership of trade unions when taking decision on issues that may affect the interest of the workers. On the other hand, workers should endeavour to comply with rules of their company and be prepared to adapt to changes meant to give their organizations competitive advantage in the industry.

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