

INDUSTRIAL CONFLICT: EMPLOYEES COMMITMENT AND PRODUCTIVITY IN THE NIGERIAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

ANIEMEKA, IJEOMA GRACE, Ph.D.

Department of Public Administration, Federal Polytechnic, Oko, Anambra state, Nigeria

Author's email: ijayaniemeka@gmail.com

Abstract

In any work organization, conflict is inevitable between employer and employees, the effect however is determined by how these conflicts are handled. The work titled: industrial conflict, employee commitment and productivity in the Nigerian educational system, resting on content analysis of study and the bargaining and accidental theory, investigated the nexus between industrial conflict, employee commitment and productivity within the educational setting. The research found out that the industrial conflict had deflected the commitment of the operators of the educational system, especially the tertiary level, thereby reducing the rate of productivity. Turnover of best brain has also jumped high. Consequently we recommended industrial democracy with clear sincerity in handling industrial dispute in the system.

Keywords: Industrial Conflict, Employee Commitment, Productivity, Tertiary Education, Industrial Democracy and Job performance

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Introduction

The educational system has been plagued with myriads of industrial actions especially at the tertiary level. The implication is that the system have become very unpredictable, so much that a student who matriculated in a certain year cannot definitely propose when to convocation. Recently the Academic Staff Union of University (ASUU) were by a court ruling mandated to return to classrooms after about 8 months of industrial action that started on the 14th of February 2022. ASUU is not alone in this struggle, at a point all the sisters union within the university communities joined in the industrial conflict. The polytechnic and colleges of education also have witness serious academic disruptions as a result of industrial conflict.

it has been difficult to place the blame, as government often accuse the operators of the educational system, accusing them of non-commitment, selfishness, corruption etc. the management, lecturers and other administrative apparatus of the system on the other hand accuse the government of being insensitive to their welfare and plights as well as under funding of the institutions. Thus this phenomenon has caused serious tensions in the sector.

The students and the parents/guidance by extension are the worst hit. They are often caught between the cross fire and helplessly and hopelessly watch each time the dagger is drawn between the operators of the sector or any partb of it and the government. Expectedly, when the elephant fight, the grass will always suffer. The students suffers in various ways and dimensions during this face off.

Human resources are critical for effective organizational functioning (Terpstra and Rozell, 1992 in Onah, 2015) is not in doubt. Availability of resources is a vital need for the survival of human venture. These include human materials and financial resources, which are very useful in the production chain. Out of all these resources, the human component appears to be the most vital and critical” Organizational commitment is a psychological state of the employee mind towards his organization, therefore whatsoever that affect the commitment level of the workers is likely going to affect his performance and productivity as well.(Njoku, 2005:1 cited in Ifegwu, 2015)

Therefore, our focus in this work is to explore the variable of industrial conflict within the Nigerian educational system and x-ray its impact on the employee's commitment of this sector and the effect it has on their productivity.

Conceptual and Literature Review

Industrial conflict

Conflict is a disagreement between two or more individuals, groups with each individual or group trying to gain acceptance of its views or objective over others. Industrial conflict therefore denotes clash of interests and resultant disputes of varying intensity between different individual, groups and organizations in the industrial relation system. Industrial conflict occurs when employees express dissatisfaction with management over the current state of the management-employee relationship. Industrial conflicts in Nigeria public sector are sometimes caused by inadequate consultation by the employers of labour-the government (Ifegwu, 2015)

In any work organization, conflict of interest is inevitable between employer and employees (Dahrandorf, 1959 in ifegwu, 2015). The implication is that wherever there is interaction among individual or group, there is bound to be conflict. However, it is important to note that conflict can serve as positive force and necessary for effective performance. Conflict standing alone, may not be term good or bad rather an inevitable feature of organizational life, which should only be judged in term of its effects on productivity. Mullins (2007 in ifegwu, 2015) agrees that conflict can be seen as a constructive force which can be encouraged since it aid incremental improvement in organizations design and functioning.

Employee's commitment

In the present competitive environment, no system or organization, not even the educational institutions can perform at the maximum level, unless each employee in the organization is committed to the objectives of the institution. Hence, it is important to understand the concept of commitment and its influence for feasible outcome. (Andrew, 2017) Employee commitment therefore, is the knowledge, skills, abilities and experience of the workforce, which is useful to the organization only if the employees are willing to apply it to the achievement of the goals of the

organization. (Bandula & Jayatilake2006). This concept of employee's commitment lays emphasis on the willingness of the employee to engage his skill, knowledge and expertise to the course of the organization. The implication is that while a worker may be suitably qualify for a job and has the capacity to perform the assigned role, the issue of commitment can hinder or intervene between the potential and actual performance. Commitment also has an emotional component: People usually experience and express positive feelings toward an entity or Commitment refers to attachment and loyalty. It is associated .with the feelings of individuals about their organization. The three characteristics of commitment identified by Mowday *et al* (1982 in Armstrong, 2012), are:

- A strong desire to remain a member of the organization.
- A strong belief in and acceptance of the values and goals of the organization.
- A readiness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization.

Individual to whom they have made a commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1991, in Vance, 2006)

Mechanism for organizational commitment

There are different but divergent opinion as per what stirs up employees' commitment to the organization. Hellriegel et al. (2001:54) argue that, as with job satisfaction, the sources of commitment may vary from person to person. Employees' initial commitment to an organization is determined largely by their personal qualities and how well their early job experiences match their prospects. Later, Employee commitment continues to be inclined by job experiences, with many of the same factors that lead to job satisfaction are also contributing to employee commitment or lack of commitment. This may include pay, relationships with managers and subordinates, working conditions, and career prospects. Over time, employee commitment tends to become stronger because individuals develop deeper ties with the institute and their colleagues as they spend more time with them; seniority often brings advantages that tend to develop more positive attitudes; and opportunities in the job market may decrease with age giving rise to continuance commitment, causing workers to become more strappingly committed to their current job. (Bandula, 2006).

Elements of Employee commitment

Owing to lack of clear, precise, concise and widely accepted definition of the term ‘employee commitment’, arriving at the factors that makes for committed employee is not an easy task. Indeed, it is instructive to state that the antecedents of employee commitment vary based on personality, organizations, workplace environment etc. The difficulty is further made demanding since commitment goes beyond job satisfaction and is simply not job motivation. Therefore it must be the combination of sets of elements that gets the employees committed and dedicated to the organization and its values to the extent that the workers are ready to offer his or her best for the success and development of the organization, engage in organizational citizenship as well as willingness to remain with the organization for a long period of time (Derek *et al*, 2014) It therefore apposite to assert that employee commitment is a **multi-dimensional concept** that encompasses a variety of **different elements**.

Balain and Sparrow (2009) in Armstrong (2012) opined that some of the antecedents of employee commitment include: 1. Enriched and challenging jobs (job characteristics) 2. Qualities of the employee-organization relationship (perceived organizational support) 3. Qualities of the employee-supervisor relationship. (Perceived supervisor support) 4. Rewards and recognition. 5. Fairness in the processes that allocate resources or resolve disputes (procedural justice). 6. What is considered just or right in the allocation of goods in a society (Distributive justice).

However employee commitment does not depend solely on the organization. Some intrinsic and extrinsic trait or characteristics of the employee has a role to play. Based on this, we are going to look at the elements of employee’s engagement from these two broad band of *Organizational and personal*.

Organizational:

- The provision of fair deal: this has to do with matching the capacities of individuals to the demand of the work they have to do. This will also involve the procedural justice (Balain and Sparrow (2009). The promotion processes is also considered here.
- Work-life balance: to engage the worker actively, there is the need to balance between work and life. The organization should evolve policies for flexible working conditions that will eject the need of the individual worker life outside of his job.
- The provision of opportunity for growth: the organization should maximize skill variety, enriching the task and making it significant enough to challenge the workers. Giving the

workers some level of autonomy and discretion, at the same time providing control and feedback.

- Leadership/qualities of management: organizational engagement can be developed through high-involvement management...the underlying hypothesis is that employees will increase their involvement with the company if they are given the opportunity to manage and understand their work. (Lawler, 1986, Armstrong, 2012). It is worthy to note that employees join companies and leaves management (Armstrong, 2012). When workers are treated as partners and their interest respected, it fosters a synergy and has multiplication effect. (Lawler, 1986, Armstrong, 2012).
- Involvement with colleague: Derek *et al.*, (2014) refers to it as organizational citizenship. It involve encouraging the development of social tie within the organization. In the words of Capelli (2000; 108) “Loyalty to company may be disappearing but loyalty to colleague is not. Man as a social animal thrives in a amiable social milieu.
- The way people are treated: the organization should ensure that policies for controlling bullying and harassment especially the vulnerable, are in place and applied.

Personal:

- Expertise/experienced: it’s an age long adage the bad workman quarrels with his tools. This predisposes that employees that lacked expertise and the requisite experience will be hard to engage no matter what the organization put in place. This become a serious factor in the developing economies like Nigeria as a result of the tribalism, nepotism, corruption and other vices.
- Religious background: the religious faithful that are passionate about their affinity with their God can proved to be deadly committed and enthusiastic about their job. Their commitment may not be determined by the organization.
- Patriotism: often the employee may show loyalty and committed with their job basically because of their patriotism to their community or the society, their engagement is not a function of any organizational or even personal affiliation.

Job performance

Employee Performance is defined as the attained outcome of actions with the skills of employees who perform in some situation (Prasetya & Kato, 2011)

Employee's productivity

Productivity refers to the rate at which goods and services are produced by a standard population of workers. The rate here may not simply allude to frequency, rather include the quality in this regard. Therefore when we talk about employee productivity, we refer to the output of the employees measured against the standard of goods or services expected of them.

Tertiary education

Tertiary education denotes the post-secondary education in Nigeria. It's comprised of the university, polytechnics, and colleges of education, technical training institutes and higher vocational schools. They engage in manpower training for industrial and societal productivity.

Industrial democracy

Industrial democracy denotes a situation where the employees in the work setting are allowed to participate, to a large extent, in determining the condition of their working lives. It involves a participatory system where the employees are valued by the employer. The welfare of the workers becomes employers' optimum priority and industrial harmony exists between the employer and the employees.

Theoretical framework

The theoretical discussion is on the theory of bargaining and accidental theory.

The theory of bargaining according to Paldam and Pedersen 1982 considers strike as a strategic action in the process of bargaining. This theory attributes more strategic autonomy to labour and management, assuming that each party has perfect information about the other's intentions. According to this theory, economic conditions are the most important determinant of the

propensity to strike. In this regard change in the economic condition such as inflation may induce strike action.

The theory is apposite to the study in the sense that most of the causes of the industrial actions in the educational system is usually struggle about increment in salary, inflation, welfare of the members of the union and much more. a case in hand is the need for re-negotiation of the 2009 agreement between the government and ASUU and the problem of IPPIS which did not capture the allowances of the lecturers in full, hence the last 8 months strike.

The accidental theory which stipulates that the real reason for strike is breakdown in negotiation between parties (Hicks, 1963). The theory contend that majority of strike is as a result of faulty negotiation. Hence, a good way of reducing strike is to identify variables that increase uncertainty for one or both patties in the bargaining process. the accidental theory considers the institutional factors as very important to explain strike.

The eight-month strike embarked by the Academic staff Union of University was a roll-over strike. The implication is that they were playing the strike card to government to force them (the government) to come to the table of bargain according to the first theory (theory of bargain). However, when the bargaining process failed or failed to yield positive result, the strike was rolled over until it became an elongated strike.

Industrial Conflict, Employee commitment and productivity

Development Dimensions International noted that employee's commitment is the extent to which people enjoy and believe in what they do, and feel valued for doing it (Vance, 2006)

In an article titled "How to manage change and build employee commitment". Heathfield (2020) wrote extensively on how organizations can introduce changes at work so that their introduction will build employee commitment and support. One factor extensively highlighted in the write up is employee participation, which is also called employee involvement or participative management, which Heathfield describes as creating an environment in which people have an impact on decisions and actions that affect their jobs. In her opinion, employee involvement increases ownership and commitment, retains the best employees, and fosters an environment in

which people choose to be motivated and contributing. The author noted that management practices, which can involve employees in decision-making and continuous improvement activities are: suggestion systems, manufacturing cell, work teams, continuous improvement meetings and events, corrective action process, and periodic discussions with the supervisors. According to Heathfield, intrinsic to most employee involvement processes is training in team effectiveness, communication, and problem-solving; the development of reward and recognition systems; and frequently, the sharing of gains made through employee involvement efforts. Finally, Heathfield posited that the degree of management's involvement of other employees will depend on the size and scope of the hoped-for changes because, and involving as many people as possible if not in person - at least, with a process for idea contribution, will help implement change more effectively. The article is very insightful and lends professional leadership skills to organizations that regularly adopt and undergo changes in processes and proceedings. The insights and recommendations made in the script cannot be undermined by any organization fostering the effective implementation of change without losing the commitment of its employees.

One of the major issue in the last face-off between the government and ASUU is the introduction of payment platform known as IPPIS with the hope of curbing perceived corruption in the university system. The university don on the other hand felt the platform does not capture their peculiar interest and on the alternative develop their own platform known as University Transparent and accountability scheme (UTAS), which the government rejected and insist that the IPPIS which is being used in almost all the ministries must be used for the university. While the Federal government has the right to introduce whatever change they feel will help the system, involving the operators of the education system from the beginning, may have averted the negative pollution and consequence it has caused the university system. Do the government consider the commitment of the employees or bent on introducing change?

Ali, Rehman, Ali, Yousaf and Zia (2010) studied the influence of corporate social responsibility on employee commitment and organizational performance and found that there is positive relationship between Corporate Social Responsibility and Employee Commitment as well as between Employee Commitment and organizational performance; thus, organizations engage in social activities can lead to higher Employee Commitment because the activities include the welfare of employees and their families, resulting in the increase in Firm Performance. The other

matter that resulted in the industrial action by the ASUU is the renegotiation of the 2009 agreement between the federal government and the union. Unfortunately over ten years later, the agreement is yet to be fully implemented. This shows clear insensitivity of the government to the welfare of the operators of the University and by extension educational system.

Korir and Kipkebut (2016) studied the effect of financial and non-financial rewards on the organizational commitment of employees in universities in Nakuru County of Kenya using a sample size of 224 full-time lecturers from 10 universities. The study found that there is a significant positive relationship between financial rewards and affective commitment and that financial reward management practices collectively have significant effect on organizational commitment. The study then recommended that universities in Nakuru County should carry out salaries reviews in order to develop a reward management structure that is externally competitive, internally fair and consistent with the current acceptable international rates. The issue of salary increment and earned allowance is a major issue in the industrial conflict between the duos.

Atoko, Taylor and Sichinsambwe (2018) did a study which purpose was to establish the relationship between training and development, affective commitment, relational contract and productivity in organizations based in Lusaka Zambia. The sample frame constituted of 10,077 companies located in Lusaka. Simple random sampling technique was used to select 200 companies for the survey (based on the list of companies obtained from Patents and Companies Registration Agency). The findings of this research concluded that, training and development is positively related to productivity, affective commitment and relational contract. The study also established that affective commitment and relational contract are not related to productivity. Since there is a positive relationship between training and development and productivity, firms should prioritize training and development if they are going to increase productivity and hence become more competitive in the market place. Hence training and development budgets should be increased in order to ensure continuous productivity in organizations based in Lusaka Zambia. We must commend the federal government through the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFUND) for a job well done. However the conference sponsorship which has been placed on hold is another area the government need to look into.

Folkman (2014) in an article titled “The 9 top causes for uncommitted employees (and how to turn them around)”. The study found the following as the main points of employee dissatisfaction: poor leadership, poor career and job opportunity in the organization, lack of meaning and purpose in the job performed, perceived unfair treatment by management, perceived or actual lack of appreciation and value for their efforts, little confidence that issues raised by them will be addressed, amount of work is unreasonable, perceived inefficiency and ineffectiveness of the organization, and because diversity is not appreciated. The study revealed that uncommitted employees are more often employees with education, experience and even good performance ratings. It concluded that while their reasons for disengagement are complex, their motivation is most often associated with the way they are treated by the government(sic). The feeling of every Nigerian teacher or lecturer is that they are not appreciated, poor or bad leadership is one of the reasons what seems genuine concern in the system end in conflict

Yigit (2016) observed that concrete rewards such as money and other benefits make employees spend extra effort and not to leave their organizations. The researcher maintained that a successful socialization of an individual in an organization increases organizational commitment, harmony and success. Data were collected from a sample of 270 hospital personnel with the instrumentality of questionnaires while factor analysis and regression analysis were applied with the assessment of Cronbach’s Alpha. According to the findings of the paper, affective commitment factor has a positive effect on institution-duty factor, education factor and work-colleague factor of organizational socialization. In his concluding remarks, the researcher notes that it is possible to say that when the level of organizational commitment increases, social exchange level of Kocaeli University employees also increases. He recommended that in order to increase patient and employee satisfaction, employees equipped with the best skills should be chosen; socialization process of employees should be supported and it should be understood that organizations are a means of social exchange for employees. Therefore, social exchange, organizational socialization and organizational commitment processes established between the parties must be managed effectively.

Another factor that can affect the commitment of the Nigerian lecturers is fairness in the processes that allocate resources or resolve disputes (procedural justice). Often times, efforts by the union to

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engage the government in peaceful dialogue proves abortive, correspondents to this effect are always often negated until there is tension in the system through industrial action before the government will reluctantly try to engage them. This alone constitutes reason for non-commitment on the part of the lecturers.

What is considered just or right in the allocation of goods in a society (Distributive justice). The average annual earning of a lecturer is a peanut compared to an average politician even at the local level. But unfortunately the government stance will always be "there is no money"

From the foregoing, we have seen that most of the mechanism that hampers employee's commitment as established by experts are present within the educational system in Nigeria especially the tertiary level. It will be safe to conclude that the incessant industrial conflict in the system must have generated feeling of disloyalty and the quest to leave the country. The number of lecturers wishing and applying to leave the shore of Nigeria is a testimony to this. According to Schmidt (1974 in Ifegwu 2015), some of the negative consequences of conflict include: some people feel defeated and demeaned, the distance between people increases, climate of suspicion and mistrust developed, resistance developed instead of team work, an increase in turnover of employees. We can see all of these effects in the educational system. ASUU as a body today feels defeated and demeaned by the government of the day.

Habib, Khurshed and Idrees (2010) investigated the relationship between job satisfaction, job performance attitude and organizational commitment, they found that employees having greater Employee Commitment perform better than those with lower Employee Commitment. On the other hand, those with low level of commitment perform low despite their potential. Consequently, their production rate is very low.

Researches in the past have examined a number of elements that can affect job performance. Jaramillo et al. (2005) showed that a crucial element is employees' commitment to their job. Studies have highlighted that Commitment has a great impact on the successful performance of an organization (Bandula *et al*, 2006) In fact, a vast number of studies have found positive relationships between organizational commitment and employee behaviors such as a greater effort exerted by the employee in performing tasks, better work attendance, increased willingness to

engage in citizenship behavior and higher delivery of service qualities. Appelbaum *et al* (2000:183) noted that: 'The willingness to exert extra effort is the aspect of organizational commitment that has been shown to be most closely related to an employee's job performance' Nabukeera et al (2015) states that "employees' commitment has become a major determinant of the organizational performance in particular the performance of government institutions or program". Abelson (1976 in Banadula et al 2006) stated that "Higher level of employee commitment in the organization for individual projects or business is assumed as a major reason for better employee performance that leads to organizational success". The high levels of effort exerted by employees with high levels of organizational commitment would lead to higher levels of performance and effectiveness of both the individual and the organizational levels. (Andrew, 2017). In the today's dynamic environment in which jobs are conducted and accomplished more than ever in teams and the environment flexibility finds great importance, organizations need employees who exhibit appropriate citizenship behaviors as well. (Howeyda et al, 2014).

Conclusion

Industrial conflict is a natural phenomenon in every work environment, however, the management of conflict will either make it a constructive force or a destructive force. From the literature reviewed, we discovered that the federal government have not shown clear sincerity in the handling of the industrial conflict within the educational system

Recommendation

It is obvious that one of the best way to handle industrial conflict at any level is through industrial democracy. Industrial democracy represent a situation where workers in the industrial society are allow to participate to a large extent in determining the condition of their working live. If the government of Nigeria will engage in industrial democracy sincerely with the workers the education system will come alive again and produce the required manpower that will bring sustainable development to the country.

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