Appraisal of Conflict Management as a Tool for Achieving Industrial Harmony

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This study sought to appraise the efficacy of conflict management in achieving industrial harmony in Etisalat Nig. Ltd. Conflict has been observed to take a dangerous trend in Nigeria thus the urgent need for its proper management and transformation as essential for peace and progress in the workplace. The problem of conflict in organizations has not only persistently led to low productivity in the industries but also in the disruption in the growth and development of the economy as a whole. The major concern of this study was to determine ways of sustaining harmonious industrial relations in the future thereby avoiding disruptive conflicts. The study adopted the survey research design using questionnaires to collect primary data where a total of 320 respondents were randomly selected from the population as the sample size and 300 respondents returned their questionnaires representing 97% response rate. Data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Hypotheses were tested through chi-square method. The findings revealed that poor conflict management has devastating effects on Industrial Harmony of Etisalat Nigeria. It was also revealed that conflict is associated to performance standard targets. To this end, it was recommended that the standards set by management be specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and should have time limit. It was also recommended that management should enhance communication with staff to address issues that can produce conflicts before they break open. And also, the management should disseminate information or give orders clearly by formally instructing employees on the use of written guidelines (e.g. memos, circular etc.) and procedures to prevent communication gap, so that staffs will have a clear understanding and correct interpretation of all information and instructions which in turn lead to industrial Harmony.

Key words: Conflict, Management, Industrial Harmony, Etisalat, Nigeria
INTRODUCTION

Conflicts are an inevitable part of organizational life since the goals of different stakeholders such as management and staffs are often incompatible. Conflict is an unpleasant reality in any organization as long as people compete for jobs, resources, power, recognition and security. Organizational conflict can be regarded as a dispute that occurs when interests, goals or values of different individuals or groups are incompatible with each other. This results into a situation whereby they frustrate each other in an attempt to achieve their objectives. Conflict arises in groups because of the scarcity of freedom, position, and resources. People who value independence tend to resist the need for interdependence and, to some extent, conformity within a group. People who seek power therefore struggle with others for position or status within the group.

Conflict is part of organizational life and may occur between individuals, between the individual and the group, and between groups. While conflict is generally perceived as dysfunctional, it can also be beneficial because it may cause an issue to be presented in different perspectives. Conflict has both positive and negative effects. It can be positive when it encourages creativity, new looks at old conditions, the clarification of points of view, and the development of human capabilities to handle interpersonal differences. Conflict can be negative when it creates resistance to change, establishes turmoil in organization or interpersonal relations fosters distrust, builds a feeling of defeat, or widens the chasm of misunderstanding.

The establishment and continuous existence of organization through the realization of set goals and objectives requires the continuous and effective functioning of its material input with the human element being indispensable. However, the human elements required to facilitate goals attainment often engage in disagreement and variance over factors such as interest, views, style of management among others. The reactionary effect is due to the perceived incompatibilities resulting typically from some form of interference or opposition termed conflict. Azamosa, (2004) observed that conflicts involve the total range of behaviours and attitudes that is in opposition between owners/managers on the one hand and working people on the other. It is a state of disagreement over issues of substance or emotional antagonism and may arise due to anger, mistrust or personality clashes. Irrespective of the factors resulting in conflict, it has been observed that industrial conflicts produce considerable effects on organizations and should be consciously managed as much as possible.

Nevertheless, the term "conflict" has only the connotation of "bad" for many people; so much so that they think principally in terms of suppression, giving little or no attention to its more positive side. The absence of conflict may indicate autocracy, uniformity, stagnation, and mental fixity; the presence of conflict may be indicative of democracy, diversity, growth, and self-actualization. These are mechanism that allows to perceiving benefits of cooperative work. Furthermore, conflict is considered psychologically and socially healthy. It is psychologically healthy because it provides a breather for frustrations and enables a feeling of participation and even of joy. And it is sociable and healthy because it encourages opposition to the status quo and provides conditions for social chances and democracy stemming from pluralism and respect to diversity. Conflict is ubiquitous, not necessarily dysfunctional and can be required to defy people to perform and stimulate progress.
For people to progress at work and other aspect of life, there must be cooperation which is essential to ensure task attainment and stability in life. However, it would be wrong to reach the conclusion that cooperation is good while conflict is bad, this is because both concepts are pervasive and co-exist in our social life. Conflict is inevitable given the wide range of goals for the different stakeholder in the organization and its absence signifies management emphasizes conformity and stifles innovation. Conflict may be interpersonal or inter group with Interpersonal conflicts occurring between a supervisor and his subordinate or between two individuals at the same level of the organizational hierarchy. Inter group conflicts often occur between two trade unions, between two departments or between management and workers while attempting to implement the policies and programme of the organization.

Statement of the Problem

At present, there are frequent occurrences of conflict management in almost all the industrial sector of the economy, which eventually endangers the growth and development of the economy and the achievement of the overall goals of these industries. The case of conflict management usually arises within the junior and senior cadres and between management and union respectively. As a result of this, the various sources of conflict management need to be studied, the forms that this industrial conflict takes need to be addressed and also the management of this industrial conflict needs to be found. Conflict managements do not only have effect on the organizations which lead to low productivity in the industries but also in the disruption in the growth and development of the economy as a whole.

Objectives of the Study

This study had the following objectives:

1. To examine the effect of management of conflicts on industrial harmony.
2. To find out the effect of industrial unrest on employees’ performance in an organization.
3. To determine the implications of conflicts on the growth of an organization.
4. To suggest effective ways of employing conflict management to enhance industrial harmony.

Research Questions

This research work enables the researcher to come up with answers to the following research questions namely:

1. What extent can management of conflict influence industrial harmony?
2. How does industrial unrest impact employee performance?
3. What are the implications of conflicts on organizations’ growth?
4. How can conflict be managed to enhance harmonious industrial relations?

Research Hypothesis

\[ H_0: \text{Conflict management has no significant effect on Industrial Harmony.} \]
Significance of the Study

A study on industrial relations would not only be beneficial to the organization, employers of labour and employees but to the society as a whole. Labour issues have bearing with integrated national planning. It contributes to manpower development and harmonial industrial relations, which promotes rapid economic development. Besides, a peaceful industrial atmosphere is required to actualize the noble objectives for which business organizations were set or established to achieve.

Scope and Limitation of the Study

This study focused on the appraisal of conflict management as a tool for achieving industrial harmony. Emphasis is laid on the management of industrial conflicts with a view to identifying the concept, effects, the dimension and socio-economic implications of industrial disputes in organizations.

The scope also revolves on the machinery of reaching collective bargain and identification of parties and their objectives to labour relations. The scope of the study will be limited to Etisalat Nigeria Plc. The information used for the analysis covered the five years period between 2010 and 2015 respectively. This company was carefully chosen because they consist of employees from diverse nationalities, culture, religious, educational backgrounds etc. and responses gathered can be generalized.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Concept of Conflict Management

Unions and management tend to have opposite views because of the divergence between the expectations of management and labour in organizations which often leads to conflicts. Conflict by nature is a constant phenomenon in any human organization. It is so ubiquitous in social life that it has been isolated by some as the basic unit for understanding social existence (Ajala, 2003; Alimba, 2010). The endemic nature of conflict in human grouping has been traced to the pursuit of divergent interests, goals and aspirations by individuals and/or groups in defined social and physical environment (Otite, 2001). Thus, conflict remains the most permanent feature that makes humanity convinced that growth and development are predicated on conflicts. Though conflict is generally perceived as something devastating, abnormal, dysfunctional and detestable, yet it could be a precursor of positive change if constructively handled (Edwards, 2002; Hammed & Ayantunji, 2002). As a concept, conflict has been subjected to diverse definitions by various scholars based on the context and their understanding of the concept. For example, Lederach (1995) described conflict as an ongoing situation that is based on deep seated differences of values, ideologies, and goals. In support of this definition, Fisher et al (2004) defined conflict as a relationship between two or more parties (individuals or groups) who have or think they have incompatible goals. It therefore implies that conflict is a continuous interaction that span through lifetime of man and not just a one-off relationship.
Also, one of the most quoted traditional definitions of conflict describes it as struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power and resources in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralize, injure, or eliminate their rivals (Coser, 1956). This description of conflict explains the reasons why workers are often ready to ground all economic or productive activities via strike in a bid to get their demands met. In corroboration with Coser’s definition of conflict, Constantino et al (1995) described conflict as the process of expressing dissatisfaction, disagreement or unmet expectations with any organizational interchange. But in his contribution, Otite (2001) conceptualized conflict as a way of settling problems originating from opposing interests and from the continuity of society. Ajala (2003) succinctly summarizes the discourse on conflict when he said conflict is the mechanism which keeps society going.

Conflict managements, on the other hand are viewed as the clash of interest and resulting disputes of varying intensity between individuals, groups and organizations in the industrial relations system (Akanji, 2005). Fajana (2000) sees conflict management as the inability of these parties either between employers and employees or within their groups to reach agreement connected with the object of employer-employees interaction, whether or not this inability results in strikes or lockout or other forms of protestation. Another definition that seems to be the most acceptable sociological definition of conflict management is that of Kornhauser, Dubin and Ross(1954), which viewed conflict as the total range of behaviour and attitudes that express opposition and divergent orientations between individual owners and managers on the one hand, and working people and their organizations on the other”.

Related to the above definition is that of Onyeonoru (2005), who holistically defined industrial conflict as all expressions of dissatisfaction within the employment relationship especially, those pertaining to the employment contract and effort bargain. He expatiated further that it includes formal expressions of conflict, organized along the lines of trade unions and employers associations as well as the informal conflict that lack systematic organizations such as covert grievances that may be expressed in the form of industrial sabotage, absenteeism, or lateness. Smyth (1977) defined it as "the inability of two conflicting bodies to reach agreement on any issue connected with object of management interaction, whether or not, this conflict results into a strike, lock-out or other forms of protestation".

Hinds support the analysis of Otobo, (2000) who said that the fact that there is no sign of overt conflict in a given period does not mean other forms of conflict managements are not occurring. Dahrendorf, (1959) said that "conflict of interest is inevitable between employer and employee because an authority relationship in the aim of the two parties will at least lead to conflicts". Dahrendorf, holds the view that there will always be conflicts between those in authority and those without authority, that is, the governing and the governed, because of divergent views on the basic employment relationship, which seems to make some degree of conflict inevitable at the work place. He observed that while the government wants to impose on the governed, the governed want to have a say in the imposition upon them. It is the absence of having a say that usually brew conflict. Yesufu, (1996) said, Conflict is a normal and inevitable part of everyday life. As it is destructive, so also, it is beneficial depending on the situation, circumstance and the issue at stake.
Usually conflict result in wasteful use of human and material resources leading to low productivity, retrenchment, dismissal, and alienation. Conflict can manifest itself in the form of unrest, work stoppage (strikes), sabotage, absenteeism, work to rule, lock out, and so on. The most common of the manifestation of conflict is strike. This implies that conflict as a phenomenon can manifest in diverse ways such as strike, absenteeism sabotage, labour turnover, pilfering and restriction of output, lockout and a host of others. Ubeku, (1984), opined that most conflicts are caused by motivational factors. He stated that an employee who feels aggrieved against a manager, a supervisor or against the company as a whole is an unhappy employee and an unhappy employee cannot work effectively. The employee becomes very low; satisfaction at work in terms of all the circumstances that surround the job is the key to high morale. It does not matter how well paid and interesting a job may be unless the individual performing the job feels that he is being fairly treated his morale will be adversely affected.

Folarin, (1988) stated that individuals, group and organization or institution are naturally not in the state of harmony or equilibrium and that conflict is a natural and inevitable occurrence in human condition. He stated further that conflict is not invariably synonymous with a breakdown in communication but rather, it is a different type of communication, which may in fact be the ideal mode of expressing ideas. The most liable treatment is often conflict management rather than conflict resolution. He also pointed out that not all conflict is detrimental to the individual, group or organization. He stated that it is generally recognized that there can be no change without conflict and without change there can be no progress or development whether personal, social or scientific.

Conclusively, conflict is defined within the context of work relationship as inevitable disagreements between and within any or all of the actors in the work place. The views of various writers on the concept of conflict and industrial conflicts have established that conflict is inevitable and that it is not inherently dysfunctional rather its outcome depends on how it is handled or responded to by the parties involved. Whether conflict is seen as central or ancillary to the employment relationship, however, depends upon one’s conceptualization or larger view of the origins, function and structure of this relationship. From one perspective, historically and contemporaneously reflected in the work of industrial relations scholars, the employment relationship is a pluralist, mixed motive relationship featuring two parties, labor and management, with opposing interests; hence, conflict is inevitable in this relationship.

Sources of Conflict management

A. Internal Source

This comprise of disagreements arising within the organization. Conflict orientations within a work setting centers basically on the oppose nature of the interest of employers and employees in the organization. The employer is seeking the greatest possible output at the least cost. The employer is constantly seeking to lower the wage rate, to lengthen the hours of work, to speed up the workers, to layoff and to discharge workers whenever it is temporarily economical. On the other hand, the union which represents the workgroup is seeking continuous employment for its members at the highest possible conditions in respect of hours of work, security and continuity, safety, comfort, sanitation, esteem and so on. In this relation, both the employers and the
employees want the largest cut of the industrial cake that they both cannot get. Conflict is perception, so it begins when someone believes that another might obstruct his or her efforts. Conflict could arise because of the employer’s quest to maximize profit while the workers representatives are out to ensure continuous improved condition of living for their member’s conflict could also arise as a result of failure to honour agreed items on collective bargaining. Otobo (2000) emphasizes those workers rights and employers prerogatives which when trampled upon, could cause conflict. These include pay, condition of services, style of management, nature of physical environment of the work place, orientation or social consciousness of workers, efficacy or otherwise of the promotion system and cumbersoness of grievance and communication problems among others.

B. External source

These include government industrial and economic policies, the nature of labor legislation, unpatriotic and unethical behaviour of the political and economic classes, national economic mismanagement and general distribution of wealth and power in the society. The important thing to note about these factors is that both workers and management respond to them. Some of the external causes of conflict may however not directly instigate industrial conflict, but they do influence general social expectation. Ojeli, (1977) stated that the causes of industrial conflict in Nigeria is due to the lukewarm attitude of employers and government in responding to the demands of the workers or treating their demand with levity, and also, non-recognition of the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) as an organ for harmonizing possible conflict between the employers of labor and employees. He also argued that most union leaders are politically motivated by making a big case out of nothing in order to obtain cheap popularity. More often than not, they cause confusion in their organization when they capitalize on trivial matters to blow their trumpets.

However, there is a consensus that conflict is inevitable in all interactions of human beings. Organizations exemplify this by the way it is structured, because there are different individuals and groups, various departments, divisions, units, etc. These various groupings struggle to maintain their identities, missions and roles in carrying out their different functions which harbor abundant opportunities of conflict. Conflict management has the potential to be very costly for both employees and employers. Effective employment relations are crucial to avoiding conflict in the first place, and ensuring that any disputes are resolved quickly and inexpensively. It is important however, to consider the financial, personal, social, political and international costs and benefits of industrial conflict.

A) Financial: The primary cost of conflict is the financial damage to both employees and employers. Conflict can result in lost production, increased costs of production, lost revenue and reduced profits. The employees will forego pay and reduce their job security if they go on strike.

B) Personal: Personal costs are more difficult to identify and almost impossible to measure. Any level of industrial conflict must increase the level of tension within the workplace. This tension is experienced by workers and management alike, and could lead to further breakdowns in communication. Low morale is a very real problem and a major result (and cause) of conflict.
C) Social: Personal costs could lead to social problems that, at first, seem totally unrelated. Tension and dissatisfaction at the workplace could be expressed in the home through increased family breakdown, and even domestic violence. These problems could be heightened if workers are not being paid for long periods of time.

D) Political: Political costs of disputes can range from the matter of challenged or damaged political reputations to internal political party disagreement. Public opinion of political parties could be damaged by the mishandling of a dispute.

E) International Cost: The international costs of industrial conflict largely relate to the lost markets and lost market share because the business and the country gains a reputation as an unreliable supplier. In the past, disputes on the waterfront, for example, have held up shipments of exports, causing foreign buyers to question their future dependence on Australian supplies.

Furthermore, when employees and employers are caught up in industrial conflict, their productivity falls and financial costs are increased. Australian businesses then become less competitive internationally, compared to efficient businesses overseas.

The Concept of Industrial Harmony

Industrial relations is the process and institution through which employment is managed, such as trade union and employers’ associations (Kuper and Kuper 1996). Fox, A. (2003) defines industrial relations as "the process of interest accommodation by which conditions of work are fixed; relations are regulated and power is shared in the field of labour". Yesufu (1985), on his part sees industrial relations as "the whole web of human interactions at work which is predicated upon and arises out of the employment contract". Both definitions recognized that industrial relations is concerned with the systems, rules and procedures used by union and employers to determine the reward for effort and other conditions of employment, to protect the interest of the employed and their employers and to regulate the ways in which employers treat their employees. Hyman, R. (1999) emphasized that the term industrial relations is relevant in and applies to the context within which modern society organizes its various economic and production services.

Industrial relations deals with the problem of employment, conditions of work, pay, security of employment and other issues such as labour grievances, trade disputes and their resolution within the frame work of rules and regulations, mutually to by employer and its employees. In the words of Marshall (1996), Industrial relations, (also known as labour relations) are the interdisciplinary and somewhat diffuse study of the institutions and rule-fixing processes of the labour. Its core subject-matter has always been collective bargaining between trade unions or analogous organizations on the other hand. The term "employee relation" found increasingly in management writing, was once a synonym for industrial relations.

The unpleasant side of industrial relation and on which the public often associate industrial union is strike. The strike shows a breakdown of cordial relationship between the employee represented by the labour union and employer or management. Strike are the most overt and significant aspect of industrial conflict. But they are unfortunately only a part of the phenomenon of
conflict. Most strikes involved attempts by either the union or management to change the bargaining power of the other party. When a strike is adequately used for the demand of the employees, it can force employers to concede to the demands of the employees. It can impose exorbitant costs and thereby induce them to reach agreement. A strike may be used to effect a change in the structure of bargaining and to win substantive demand by workers.

Collective bargaining can therefore be described as the industrial machinery for determining wages and conditions of employment with a view to improving the quality of work life of the employees. It encourages the power of the union to enter contract with management to determine the terms and conditions of service of its members as well as establish the procedure for handling disputes.

Types of Management/Industrial Conflicts

Many conflicts that arise in the workplace can be resolved through negotiation between the employees and employers. Sometimes, however, communications between workers and management break down and either party may resort to industrial action, such as strikes, lockouts or absenteeism. Employees may protest against the actions of an employer if they feel they are being treated unfairly. Employers may take action if they believe employees are not acting in the interests of the business. Either way, industrial action is a sign of poor employment relations.

Generally, industrial/conflict management can be divided into two groups: overt and covert.

A) Overt Forms of Conflict management: Refers to open, obvious industrial action taken by workers or management including strikes, work bans, pickets, lockouts and work-to-rule.

i. Strikes: The most publicized type of industrial action is the strike. A strike involves the withdrawal from work of a group of employees to disrupt business operations as a means of expressing dissatisfaction with some aspect of employment relations. Strikes are also used to draw community attention to the employees’ grievances and thereby place greater pressure on management (although sometimes strikes can annoy the public and reduce sympathy for workers).

ii. Pickets: Pickets are protests that occur outside or at the gates of a workplace, and are generally associated with strike action. Union members and other workers form a picket line to prevent other workers or supplies from entering the building in an attempt to disrupt business. Pickets are therefore another dramatic way for workers to express their dissatisfaction with management and can cause significant production losses for a business if prolonged.

iii. Work Bans: A work ban is a situation where workers refuse to perform some task that is usually not specified in their legal contracts. The most common form of work ban is the refusal to do overtime. Other types of ban include the black ban, which prevents workers from using equipment or performing a task that has been banned. This may be due to safety concerns or because there is a dispute over pay quotas or the introduction of new technology that displaces workers.
iv. **Lockouts:** A lockout is an extreme measure where employers physically prevent their employees from working by locking the gates to the work premises. By denying access to the building, managers effectively cut off the workers’ source of income and thereby force them to accept a management decision, negotiate or face a drawn-out dispute and financial difficulties.

v. **Work-To-Rule:** Working to rule is quite similar to a work ban and involves workers following the strict terms of their employment contract. During a period of work-to-rule, employees will not perform any task that is not specified within the terms of their employment, which tends to decrease productivity. Again, this aims to put pressure on management to listen to workers’ grievances.

B) **Covert Forms of Conflict management:** Refers to actions by workers or management which are not immediately obvious such as absenteeism, sabotage, turnover or exclusion from business decision-making.

i. **Absenteeism:** Absenteeism can be defined as the percentage of employees, on an average day, who are away from work or on sick leave without leave being approved in advance. The level of absenteeism in a workplace can act as a guide to how satisfied workers feel in their jobs. If employees are unhappy with their work conditions or their employers, they are more likely to take days off work. Businesses with effective employment relations usually experience lower levels of absenteeism among their employees.

ii. **Sabotage:** Sabotage is the deliberate damaging of physical items such as machinery and deliberate interference with products, systems and procedures. An employee with a grievance may be tempted to carry out an act of sabotage. Sabotage can cost businesses millions of dollars in lost revenue, production and reputation.

iii. **Turnover:** Like high levels of absenteeism, high voluntary labour turnover (resignations) often indicates poor staff morale or conflict in the workplace. Unskilled workers whose jobs offer little variety or interest are far more likely to resign; management might want to take steps to increase job satisfaction.

iv. **Exclusion from Decisions:** Making decisions about what will happen in a business is an important issue for both employers and employees in that business. Decisions have to be made on a wide range of issues. Conflict can certainly result when employees believe that they have not been given the opportunity to have their say.

**Implications of Industrial Conflicts on Organization**

There will always be conflict where two opposing parties exist holding different wave length in terms of their relationship. Since unfair, inequitable and discretionary, reward to the employees by the management based on the favoritism, hatred and other extraneous factors has also resulted to conflict in many organizations in Nigeria, then conflict is bound to have a very great implications on the society as a whole.
Conflict is designed to resolve divergent dualism and to maintain unity between the conflicting parties. There is a positive correlation between conflict and organizational performance. There is an optimal highly functional level of conflict at which performance is at maximum. Optimal conflict tends to:

a) Introduce solutions to problems, encourage creativity and brainstorming activity.

b) Define power relationship within a group, that is, it defines the relationship between owner of means of production and non-owners over the goals that the organization is trying to pursue, leading to industrial peace.

c) The organization’s survival is threatened when the level of conflict is low as the organization’s response to new challenges too will be low.

Jameson, J. K. (2001) ‘Business Times’ noted the conflict may be disruptive for the following reasons:

1. An organization is subject to the danger of survival when the level of conflict is too high.
2. Conflict leads to suspicion, mutual distrust and make room for defensive behaviour
3. It may lead to a breakdown in communication and interpersonal relationship with the resultant negative effect on the achievement of organizational goals.
4. In the industry, for example conflict may manifest itself in the forms of boycott, strikes, lock-out, work-to-rule, Sabotage and high labour turnover and sometimes may degenerate to violence involving mass destruction of property.
5. Major economic activities grind to a halt due to inefficient production resulting from strike, Sabotage, sit-in, work-to-rule and so forth.
6. Unemployment in the society when employers lay off workers. It could also result to in inflation in the economy.

Ways of Settling Industrial Conflict

1. Negotiation

Many of the issues that cause conflict in the workplace are part of the employment contract – a Certified Agreement. Disputes usually arise when such contracts are being renegotiated.

2. Mediation

If the parties in a dispute are unable to reach an agreement through negotiation on their own, mediation may be the next step. Mediation is the intervention into a dispute by a neutral third party such as an employment relations specialist or a lawyer. The mediator’s role is simply to encourage the parties to come together to reach common ground, and neither party is bound by the mediator’s suggestions.
Conciliation

Conciliation is the same as mediation except that it is the AIRC (an Industrial Tribunal) who acts as the mediator. If the conciliation meetings fail to bring about an agreement, then the parties will enter the final stage of arbitration.

Arbitration

Arbitration is the process that occurs when an industrial commissioner evaluates the arguments of both parties and comes to a decision which is legally binding. The decision made can be appealed.

Common Law Action

Where there is no federal or state legislation about a particular employment matter, the common law will apply. This means that certain disputes may be settled by court action.

Business/Division Closure

If a dispute is impossible to resolve it may result in the business or the division close altogether. Disputes cost businesses money in lost working time and legal expenses. Obviously, if a business is not producing its goods and services, eventually it cannot afford to pay its bills. Prolonged disputes can force business closure for financial reasons.

Collective Bargaining

Fashoyin T. (1992), defined collective bargaining as, a standard settling machinery, which constitutes an important source of regulations governing wages, salaries, and other employment conditions, mutually agreed between labour and management and in conformity with public policy. In several work situations, collection bargaining has become, so to speak the guiding principle of labour relations. It is a method through which the wages rates and other employment conditions are determined. It also establishes a set of rules guiding relations between the parties during the life of a collective agreement, as well as providing for an orderly method of settling grievances that are bound to occur from time to time.

Theoretical Perspectives or Framework of Industrial Harmony

Industrial relations scholars have described three major theoretical perspectives or frame work, that contrast in their understanding and analysis of workplace relations. The three views are generally known as unitarism, pluralist and radical. Each offers a particular perception of workplace relations and will therefore interpret such events as workplace conflict, the role of unions and job regulations very differently. The radical perspective is sometimes referred to as the “conflict model”, although this is somewhat ambiguous as pluralism also tends to see conflict as inherent in work places. Radical theories are strongly identified with Marxist theories.
Unitary Perspective

In unitarism, the organization is perceived as an integrated and harmonious whole with the ideal of “one happy family”, where management and other members of the staff all share a common purpose, emphasizing mutual cooperation. Furthermore, unitarism has a paternalistic approach where it demands loyalty of all employees, being predominantly managerial in its emphasis and application. Consequently, trade unions are deemed as unnecessary since the loyalty between employees and organizations are considered mutually exclusive, where there can’t be two sides of the industry. Conflict is perceived as disruptive and the pathological result of agitators, interpersonal friction and communication breakdown.

Pluralist Perspective

In pluralism the organization is perceived as being made up of powerful and divergent sub-groups, each with its own legitimate loyalties and with their own set of objectives and leaders. In particular, the two predominant sub-groups in the pluralistic perspective are the management and trade unions.

Consequently, the role of management would lean less towards enforcing and controlling and more towards persuasion and coordination. Trade unions are deemed as legitimate representatives of employees, conflict is dealt by collective bargaining and is viewed not necessarily as a bad thing and, if managed, could in fact be channeled towards evolution and positive change.

Radical Perspective

This view of industrial relations looks at the nature of the capitalist society, where there is fundamental division of interest between capital and labour, and sees workplace relations against this history. This perspective sees inequalities of power and economic wealth as having their roots in the capitalist economic system. Conflict is therefore seen as inevitable and trade unions are a natural response of workers to their exploitation by capital. Whilst there may be periods of acquiescence, the Marxist view would be that institutions of joint regulation would enhance rather than limit management’s position as they presume the continuation of capitalism rather than challenge it.

Industrial conflicts are the result of several socio-economic, psychological and political factors. Various lines of thoughts have been expressed and approaches used to explain this complex phenomenon.

Psychological Approach

According to Psychologists, problems of industrial relations have their origin in the perception of the management, unions and rank and file workers. These perceptions may be the perceptions of persons, of situations or of issues involved in the conflict. The perceptions of situations and issues differ because the same position may appear entirely different to different parties.
The reasons of strained industrial relations between the employers and the employees can be understood by studying differences in the perception of issues, situations and persons between the management groups and labour groups.

**Sociological Approach**

Industry is a social world in miniature. The management goals, workers’ attitudes, perception of change in industry, are all, in turn, decided by broad social factors like the culture of the institutions, customs, structural changes, status-symbols, rationality acceptance or resistance to change, tolerance, etc.

Industry is, thus inseparable from the society in which it functions. As industries develop, a new industrial-cum social pattern emerges, which provide general new relationships, institutions and behavioural pattern and new techniques of handling human resources. These do influence the development of industrial relations.

**Human Relations Approach**

Human resources are made up of living human beings. They want freedom of speech, of thought of expression, of movement etc. When employers treat them as inanimate objects, encroach on their expectations, throat-cuts conflicts and tensions arise.

Though tension is more direct in work place, gradually it extends to the whole industry and sometimes affects the entire economy of the country. Therefore, the management must realize that efforts are made to set right the situation. Services of specialists in behavioural sciences are used to deal with such related problems. It has now been increasingly recognized that much can be gained by the manager and the worker, if they understand and apply the technique of human relations approaches to industrial relations.

**Empirical Review on Conflicts Management**

Fajana, (2000) defined work place industrial relations broadly as “the totality of orientations, policies, concepts, theories, procedure and sound practice of conflict management at work”. According to him “the activities that are involved are very many, often times involving considerable Naira cost”. At any rate, whether or not these financial costs and other side effects are seen as risks or losses depend intricately on the human resource orientations of managers. Onasanya, (1999), defines industrial relations as concerning “the relationship between trade union and the employers in the industry, and the intervention of government in that relationship.” He opines that the function involves the relations and interactions between employers or management and employees, either as individuals or as groups; between supervisors and workers and his trade union, and between one trade union and the other and covers employment problems and security; conditions of work; remuneration; labour and employment grievances and disputes: level of production efficiency; safety, health and welfare of worker; social security and employee development. Industrial relations is therefore viewed from two angles: the relationships of one worker with another in production or factory floor and the relationship between labour union and management which is no less important. Industrial relations involve a coherent approach to the
problem of motivating and controlling employees, of handling grievances and conducting relationship with organized labour (Poole, 2001). He also put all these analytical blocks together to describe the industrial relations management.

Generally, poor, management of industrial relations involves significant financial costs to the parties. Consequently alternative or conflict minimizing methods are normally instituted by the industrial relations actors so that conflicts do not result in destructive industrial actions or prolonged attempts at third party resolution Fajana, (2000). Good industrial relations start from good human relations by supervisors and managers, and the aim is to ensure industrial peace or harmonious industrial relations so that the maximum level of productive efficiency can be attained, and the economic returns equitably shared by contributors.

In similar vein, Stephen and Budd (2009), posit that the term industrial relations refers to the whole field of relationship that exists because of the necessary collaboration of men and women in the employment process of modern industry. It is that part of management which is concerned with the management of enterprise whether machine operator, skilled worker or manager. It deals with either the relationship between the state and employers and workers organization or the relation between the occupational organization themselves (Budd and Bhave, 2008).

Industrial conflict management is a decision making towards ensuring workplace justice. Failure in this direction can be described as mismanagement of industrial conflicts. In Nigeria, conflicts management occurs in a matrix of unequal power relations and conflicting regulations. The use of state machineries in the management of industrial conflicts has been pivotal in Nigeria. This raises the need for effective management of conflicts to ensure workplace justice through neutrality in mediation and arbitration. Unfortunately, lack of effective management of industrial conflicts would contribute to Nigeria’s impending failure to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDG), which embodies national and international development initiatives (World Bank, 2007).

It has been shown that resolving conflicts and supporting post conflict reconstruction are prerequisites for achieving the MDG (Wordofa, 2008). In contrast, Aspinal, (2007), demonstrated that exploitation would generate conflicts through an appropriate identity based collective action. An emerging situation in Nigeria appears to sustain outrages against exploitation of labour with recurrent industrial conflicts and lack of government readiness to redeem the situation. Problems in the new policy for the management of industrial conflicts were also examined prior to the discourse on the modalities for effective management of industrial conflicts in Nigeria.

The state and labour have been battling in the management of industrial conflicts in Nigeria since the colonial era. The enormity of industrial conflicts and the state attempt to quell them resulted in the 1976 Trade Disputes Act, which was amended in 1977 and 1990. The Act provides internal and external dispute settlement machineries including voluntary and compulsory procedures. Primarily, within seven days, the declared conflicts are expected to be resolved through the application of internal mechanisms the failure of which makes external machineries necessary. External machineries include mediation, conciliation, the industrial arbitration panel (IAP) and the national industrial court (NIC).
Parties to conflicts are equally empowered to appoint a mediator, who is expected to be neutral in facilitating amicable management of conflicts within seven days or report the failure of mediation to Labour Minister, who within 14 days can appoint a conciliator or constitute the IAP for conflict management. Key attributes of a mediator are neutrality and impartiality in mediation. Neutrality refers to ability to refrain from favoritism and bias in either word or action, while impartiality refers to having equidistance from the parties and responsibility to ensure fairness of the mediation process (Cooks & Hale, 1994). The difference between impartiality and neutrality lies in the mediator’s responsibility to ensure fairness towards the parties during the process (impartiality) and being free from bias (neutrality) (Otite, O. 2001).

Studies on dispute management showed that neutrality could encourage mediator’s passivity (non-intervention), which in turn may put the more powerful disputants at an advantage (Winstanley & Woodall, 2002). Unlike the mediation and conciliation which must be concluded within seven days each, the IAP can reconcile the disputants and recommend awards within 21 days or more depending on the discretions of the Labour Minister. Parties to conflicts can reject the IAP award within seven days or allow its publication in the gazette. The NIC is the final binding path to conflict management but questions of fundamental rights can be referred to court of appeal (Otobo 2006, Aturu 2005).

Workers in essential services are not expected to pass through conflict management procedures in Nigeria. However, the Nigerian governments’ definition of essential services violates the ILO standards which demand that essential services should be interpreted very strictly. The ILO has warned that the principle whereby the right to strike may be limited or even prohibited in essential services would lose all meaning if national legislation defined essential services broadly. In line with the ILO insistence that essential services are only those interruption of which would endanger the life, personal safety or health of the whole or part of the population, Otobo (2003) condemned the list of essential services in Nigeria and described it as fake and politicized.

Each stage of conflict management is guided by rules including due notice of any matters in contention; a right to be heard; adjudication or facilitation by an impartial third party and provision of reasons for the decision made. The importance of the provision of reasons for the decision made was demonstrated by Greenberg (1994) in his study of a new “no smoking” policy in a workplace. Greenberg reported that because employees had been provided with information and a clear rationale for the unpopular policy, they embraced the changes without dispute. It was suggested that: the process of explaining decisions helps employees adapt to change, but lack of explanations is often regarded by employees as unfair, generating resentment toward management and toward the decision (Daly 1995).

Conflict management systems have been described as providing for workplace justice (McCabe & Rabil, 2001). Good conflict management procedures provide the opportunity to systematically redress an injustice without litigation, strikes or other forms of industrial actions (Mesch & Dalton, 1992). A conflict management procedure perceived to be fair will be used and regarded as effective and result in greater perception of fair treatment and enhance job satisfaction (Peterson & Lewin, 2000). Situations surrounding industrial conflicts management in Nigeria
especially the relative weakness of state machineries and prolongation of industrial disputes have affected peacemaking efforts. Mismanagement of industrial conflicts is a key outcome of the weakness of the state machineries.

The movement from mediation to other channels of industrial conflict management is evidence of the availability of compulsory procedures for industrial conflict management in Nigeria. However, the machineries for industrial conflict management in Nigeria are slow and tricky. The state and labour usually perceive industrial conflicts from different perspectives. The state usually conceptualizes industrial conflict negatively while labour employs it as negotiation instrument in a bid to obtain benefits. Fundamentally, a common interest of both the state and labour is the need to manage industrial conflict to ensure industrial peace and development. A major means of achieving industrial peace is mediation. However, the neutrality of a mediator can translate into perpetuation of power inequality between disputant parties especially if the mediator plays the role of advocacy in mediation rather than being an advocate for mediation (Cook & Hale, 1994).

It has been argued that in the absence of mediator’s intervention, mediation is intrinsically unfair, unless disputants are of roughly equal personal and professional status (Tillett, 1999). There have been a variety of responses to this mediators’ dilemma. With power imbalances in the Nigerian industrial relations, the mediator’s attempt to balance power can constitute bias and the failure to balance power will result in the maintenance of power imbalance. This was succinctly captured by Astor and Chinkin (1992), stating that, if two unequal parties are treated equally the result is inequality. This situation can be difficult when a power imbalance is not immediately obvious as indicated here: “in interpersonal disputes, power can be based on financial superiority and/or emotional and psychological factors, that is, on an ability to control others or the parties may have different levels of intelligence, articulation and ingenuity” (Clarke & Davies, 1992).

The procedures of conflict management in Nigeria are characterized by preventable delay before and after mediation, conciliation and arbitration. These procedures can be merged to reduce delay and ensure timely management of industrial conflicts. This kind of merger has yielded result in China (the most populous country and a leading industrialized country in the world). The contemporary Chinese mediation is different from the current alternative dispute management (ADR) in the USA and Australia where mediation is generally separate and distinct from court trials and mediators do not operate with nearly as much discretionary power as Chinese judges (Huang, 2006). If mediation fails in China, arbitration or adjudication will follow under the same judge unlike in Nigeria where conflicts move from mediator to different officials such as conciliator, the IAP Chairperson and the NIC Judges. In Nigeria, conflicts can linger for over two months and may remain pending in the vicious cycles of adjudication. Industrial actions are considered illegal during adjudication and the law has apparently created a vicious circle of compulsory arbitration from which workers cannot escape (Okene, 2007). Thus, the organized labour in Nigeria seems to have lost hope in the state machineries and has moved towards the establishment of a labour party. It is believed that labour party can wrestle power and correct the anomalies in the state machineries for conflict management.
METHODOLOGY

The research design used in this study is the descriptive survey method. It involves the use of a representative sample from the population. The descriptive survey research design was used because it gives greater room to study the subject matter and ensures that inferences can be made about some characteristic, attitude, or behaviour of the population examined in the study. The secondary data sources include journals, books and e-books.

The primary data collected for this study was sourced using questionnaires administered to the total population of 320 employees which also double as the sample size of the study in all the three category of the management level in Etisalat Nigeria. Three hundred (300) questionnaires, (representing 93.75% of the population) were retrieved and used as sample of the study which was sufficient enough with analysis of data. The analysis was done using descriptive statistics (frequency and Percentage) and the chi-square.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study applies descriptive statistic of frequencies and percentages (%) to analyse the demographic characteristics of the respondents, while the non-parametric statistics of chi-square ($\chi^2$) was used to test the hypotheses in line with the objectives of the study. The decision criterion for the hypotheses was tested at 0.05 percentage of significance.

Response Rate

Table 1 shows that out of the 320 questionnaire administered to employees of Etisalat Nigeria, 300 were retrieved which represent 93.71% percent response rate which was used for our analysis. Out of them representing 16.7% were returned by the top management, 31.6% by the middle management and 51.7% by lower management.

Table 1: Response Rate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Management Level</th>
<th>Numbers of Questionnaires Administered</th>
<th>Numbers of Questionnaires Retrieved</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Top</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>31.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>51.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>320</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Survey Data, 2017

Demographic Characteristic of Respondents

Since the characteristic of the respondents influence result, we therefore present the demographic data of respondents in Table 2. As it can be seen in the table, information on (3) four different characteristic of respondents that are relevant to the study are collected and interpreted. Information on respondent’s age, gender and educational qualification were collected for use in
the analysis. All the study variable scales are measured using likert scale rated vary from 1 to 3 (Agreed, Disagreed and Undecided)

Table 2: Demographic Data of Respondent

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Respondents Category</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>20 – 25 Years</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>40.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>26 – 35 Years</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>26.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>36 – 45 Years</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>26.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>46 – 55 Years</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>300</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>71.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>28.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>300</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Educational Qualification</td>
<td>Degree</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>70.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Post-Graduate</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Diploma</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Others</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>300</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Survey Data, 2017

Table 2 shows that smaller percentage of the respondents (120 or 40%) is between the ages of 20 to 25 years while majority of the respondents who fell within the economic active group between the ages of 26 and 45 constituting 26.7% each respectively. The remaining 20 or 6.6% are made up of respondents between the ages of 46 and 55.

The respondents gender as displayed in Table 2 indicates that the males 215(71.7%) were more than the females 85(28.3%) which implies that the men are more.

Finally, the table shows that virtually all the employees are educated, 210(70%) are B.Sc. degree holder, while 40(13.33%) have their post-graduate Degrees, and 30(10%) have Diploma degrees and 20(6.7%) are others. These statistics indicate most the employees are well educated.

Test of Hypothesis

Table 3: $H_0$: Conflict management has no significant effect on Industrial Harmony.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category of Responses</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>$x^2$ Value</th>
<th>Degree of Freedom</th>
<th>Critical Value</th>
<th>Remark</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agreed</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>44.7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>34.7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undecided</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>20.46</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12.59</td>
<td>Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td><strong>300</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Survey Data, 2017
Table 3 which is on the perception whether Conflict management have Significant effect on Industrial Harmony, reveals that 134 (44.7%) agreed, while 104 (34.7%) Disagreed and 62 (20.6%) were undecided respectively. This means that majority were of the opinion that Conflict management have a Significant effect on Industrial Harmony. The calculated chi-square value of 20.46 was far greater than the table value of 12.59 at DF = 6 at 0.05 level of significance. The null hypothesis was therefore rejected.

**Major Findings**

Conflicts are part of human nature and it is extremely important to study it not only for theoretical purposes but also for organizational practice. Ajala (2003) suggests that conflict analysis and its resolutions has an important role in private, public and political organizations, as well as in judicial and work disputes, in military operations and many other institutions. The results from the study indicate that the sources of conflict in the organization is diverse and cut across unacceptable employment terms, work conditions, perceived improper styles of management by the officers and ineffectiveness means of grievance communication thus in consistence with the study of Akanji (2005).

It was also revealed that the conflict in the organization relate to perception and value problems. The specific issues bother on policy implication, non-resolve of conflict between employees/management, employee compensation, welfare and inadequate communication. It was further found that the managers prefer the compromise, problem solving and dominating strategies. The results also show that the conflict management strategies in place at the organization have been relatively useful in minimizing the incidence of disruptive conflicts.

On the issue conflict management enhances industrial harmony in Etisalat Nigeria; the analysis from table 3 shows that 44.7% of the respondents agreed that effective conflict management enhances industrial harmony. 34.7% of the respondents disagreed and 20% of the respondents were undecided of the view this is in line with the study of Hammed, T. A. and Ayantunji, O. A. (2002).

**CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Conclusion**

Conflict is an inevitable outcome of humans, groups and state interactions. The study has shown that conflict is a process, and it is inevitable because individual has interdependent relationship. It is generally perceived as unwholesome because of its destructive manifestations in terms of killings, maiming and destruction of property. The fact however remains that even though we agree that conflict is a necessary evil, there is need to avoid it where possible because of its dysfunctional consequences.

In this study, conclusion was drawn from the study indicate that Conflict managements do exist in Etisalat Nigeria. Employee’s performance evaluation criteria should be clearly spelled out and communicated to all employees. Employees should be evaluated impartially considering the performance standard set. Therefore, to avoid the situation of conflicts to arise in organizations
related to performance evaluation, the standards set by management should be specific, measurable, achievable and realistic and should have time limit. In addition the employees should get the progress report on their performance. This will make employees to know their strengths and weaknesses.

Also it is concluded that organizations are adversely affected by conflicts in terms of performance and wastage of scarce resources. Similarly conflict managements do have positive effects to the industrial harmony of Etisalat Nigeria especially in increasing organizational innovativeness and improving the quality of decisions in the organization. In addition conflicts build the spirit of teamwork and cooperation among the employees of the organization. This occurs especially when they come together to resolve the conflict. Although conflicts have both negative and positive effects, the management and the employees should work towards achieving the positive effects rather than the negative.

The results of the study make pertinent contributions to existing literature of conflict management and Industrial Harmony. The findings from this study will inspire managers in various organizations to develop best strategies on how to resolve conflicts in their organizations; specifically managers should be in a position to understand the causes of organizational conflicts in their sphere of management and then develop appropriate strategies to resolve conflicts at the infancy stage in achieving industrial harmony.

**Recommendations**

Management of industrial conflict is a common phenomenon in industrial relations. Based on the discussion of findings from the analysis presented earlier of this study, it is therefore recommended that strategies which promote industrial harmony and democracy should be chosen by management as the preferred option in dispute resolution. Such strategies must include tolerance of workers opinions, readiness to engage in open discussions and deliberations on issues in conflict, willingness to deploy agreed internal conflict management strategies immediate solutions to problems of employees, uniformity in the handling of workers’ grievances, enhancement of workers’ participation in decision making, education of workers on industrial relations, good leadership style, adequate motivation as at when due, industrial democracy, harmony and adequate delegation of authority and willing to implement agreements reached in the conflict resolution process.

**REFERENCES**