

INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS AND INDUSTRIAL HARMONY: CONNECTING THE CONSTRUCTS FOR GOALS ACCOMPLISHMENT IN NIGERIAN WORKPLACE

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Abstract

This study is an extensive analysis of the interplay of nexus between industrial relations and its exceptional outcrop of industrial harmony within the prism of goal accomplishment in Nigerian work places. The blended communion of both constructs transmuted into harmonious industrial relations strengthens mutual relationship to ensure peaceful work intimacy between labour and management in reducing any organisational dysfunctions. The paper was guided by the theoretical synthesis of pluralist theory. From the extant literature, the paper contends that the cultivation of harmonious industrial relations offers both employees and management the chance to identify with one another, display high opinions of each other and also generate a workable approach of running the affairs of organisations to facilitate effective use of human and material resources for the achievement of corporate goals. However, the realization of these goals requires effective planning, efficient deployment of resources and mutual cooperation of all organisational members. In organisations where work-relation problems are amicably resolved, employees have their voices added to management processes, and interact with cordiality to induce harmonious industrial relations, makes optimization of corporate goal realizable. Harmonious industrial relations connect the work place to its mission and stimulates a conducive work environment for better organisational functionality. The paper concludes that organisations economically and optimally achieve their set goals when both employees and management increase jointly their capacity for cooperative attitude and accepts each other as partners in progress to reduce workplace disruption to actualize goal accomplishment in the work place in an emergent economy like Nigeria.

keywords: employee, goal accomplishment, harmonious industrial relations, industrial harmony and industrial relations

Introduction

In contemporary world of work, the touchstone of productive organisations, irrespective of sectors, whether public or private, of any nation's economy rests on peaceful and harmonious relations between labour and management. The relation is considered harmonious when the number of disputes and industrial actions are minimal in the workplace (Akur, 2016). Along this perception, most organized workplaces with high performance work systems strive to induce harmonious industrial relations with barest employees' grievances to ensure a healthy organizational environment. The development of this type of work situation in most organisations is ostensibly created to achieve desired goals, which may include profitability, productivity, innovation, and sustainability. These organizational goals are the result of continued bargaining and stabilization processes among relevant partners within the firm leading to multiple dimensions along which organizational goals are set (Kotlar, Massis, Wright & Fratinni, 2018). They are also strategically designed objectives to delineate expected results and guide workforce efforts in organisations. The realization of these goals requires effective planning, efficient deployment of resources, total involvement of employees and mutual cooperation of all organisational members from top to bottom of the workplace hierarchical levels. In essence, no meaningful development could be achieved in an environment devoid of peace and understanding most especially the one involving labour and management (Igbokwe, 2021).

According to Orga & Monamu (2020), industrial harmony connotes an industrial environment, where workers along with management understand and accept each other as partners in progress and where cooperative attitude is mutually beneficial in terms of output, performance and reward. It also implies an organized workplace, where labour and management as prime movers of the operational activities collaborate willingly in pursuit of corporate goals' accomplishment. The underlining assumption here, is that, industrial harmony is the soul of an organization and an uncommon fruit of a mature system of industrial relations which is pivotal to stable and productive work relations. Relatedly, Ramprakash and Harini (2020) rightly described industrial relations as all about interaction that occurs between management and staff in the daily operations of the firm. As such, its practice in the workplace involves how relations between labour and management including conditions governing work practices are regulated, how the duo stakeholders cooperate together, what conflicts arise between them and machinery in place for smooth resolution in order to facilitate industrial harmony. Thus, by understanding the dynamics of industrial relations, management can build a harmonious work place to drive the accomplishment of set goals in work organisation, especially in a developing economy like Nigeria.

However, Adekunle Abimbola and Ehiemen (2019), averred that, the aspect of labour relations that is most delicate and complex to handle is achieving industrial harmony in the modern industrial society. The reasons for this in contemporary organisations are not too far-fetched. First, there is a lot of insecurity and uncertainty in the work environment across the globe (Ryder, 2019). Second, industrial harmony is a fragile outcome of industrial relations which comes from a continuous cordial interaction between workers and management based on decentralization of decision-making processes in workplaces. These decision-making processes are controlled by multitude of policy actions on working conditions and employment relations that are decisive in determining the state of industrial relations in organisations. As a result, management must imperatively adopt in its purest form, a pluralist system of industrial relations to attain better state of tranquility in work places. The cultivation of harmonious industrial relations above all other resources makes possible the fullest utilization of the productive capacity of the workforce to accomplish the set goals in an organization.

Today, Nigerian work organisations are remarkable for their extreme hardships of stride in goal accomplishment as a result of non-harmoniousness in industrial relations. The fallout has actively retarded the growth of industrial peace and harmony in most workplaces in Nigeria. As Bamidele (2020), aptly put it, the strike incidence and propensity in Nigeria is alarming. This situation has been responsible for the wide gulf of relationship between labour and management, creating dissonance in harmonious industrial relations and exacerbating vapid goal attainment in most Nigerian organizations. In consequence, to build a high-performance work organization in achieving set goals, Chinedu, Vincent and Enaini (2018) argued that, it is industrial harmony that brings about employees having sense of belonging in the running of affairs of the organization and taking responsibility which can as well lead to a peaceful working environment. What this view suggests is that, harmonious relations between labour and management are potent catalyst and effective value adding resource for attainment of set goals in a global organisation including Nigeria. The synergy between industrial harmony and industrial relations ensures that organisational operations run unobstructed with less industrial strife for the achievement of corporate goals in work places, especially in an emerging economy like Nigeria.

Thus, this paper aims to synthesize the nexus between industrial relations and industrial harmony, provide the theoretical anchorage, and underpin the aiding factors to develop harmony in industrial relations and cohere the constructs for goals accomplishment in Nigeria organisations. The paper as well proffers remedies to attain this situation.

Literature Review

Industrial Relations

Industrial relations is a generic term with numerous definitions, but all are concerned about people, rules, regulations, policies, and procedures in work-places. According to Wijayanti, Endarto and Kusnadi (2022), it is the system of relations formed by players in the process of producing goods and services, which consists of employers, workers and government. As such, industrial relations is mainly a rule making device and process for job determination in organized workplaces. It is also described as an interactional relationship between organization of workers, represented by trade unions and employers of a group or employers (Anyim, Danesie & Ufodiama, 2015). This implies that industrial relations is a determined endeavour to govern workplace relationships as a value-adding function between labour and management towards the achievement of organisational goals. More concretely, industrial relations is a management tool applied to eradicate or remove industrial conflict, thus, ensuring industrial peace and harmony (Okolie & Ojomo, 2020).

Practically in organised work places, industrial relations encompass the whole gamut of organizational activities and focuses attention on the relationship between the various components of the organization in the lawful manner of achieving its set goals and objectives. To this end, the concept of industrial relations introduces the balancing of relations, cooperation and formulation of rules and regulations to maintain harmonious relations in the workplace (Obisi, 2017). As such, the goal of industrial relations is to establish harmonious employee relations and reduce workplace friction (Budd, 2018). This makes it to be vividly concerned with the building of an enabling environment conducive for the promotion of organization stability and development. Hence, the existential motive of industrial relations is the maintenance of industrial peace and creation of congenial environment which can enhance or increase organizational productivity (Onyebuchi, Owajimogobo & Izim, 2018).

Industrial Harmony

Industrial harmony is a positive and an engaging concept with cluster of meanings used closely in reference to industrial relations paradigm. According to Danraka (2021), it is a state of peace in organization which can be assessed in terms of the absence of strikes, distrust among the working group, peaceful relationship between management of the organization and union and also a positive perception of employees of their contribution as participants within the organization. As such, industrial harmony is a state of relative peace and cordiality characterized by trust, unity of purpose and absence of discontent in organizational relationship (Nwuche & Amah, 2016). It is a product of humane interaction and pleasant labour-management orientation based on the outcome of sound industrial relations practice in order to create a climate of belongingness for the workforce in organisations. In this connection, industrial harmony has the potential to transform people within organisations by making them more democratic, politically aware, active, social and public-spirited, cooperative, concerned for the general good and reduce organizational dysfunctions (Adekoya, 2015)

This suggests that industrial harmony only thrives in an atmosphere of shared understanding and good collaboration between labour and management, where work-relational problems are amicably resolved in an acceptable manner and on a continuous basis in work organizations. According to Ndibisi – Okolo; Onyeizugbe & Anekwe (2022), industrial harmony is a state of organizational stability, where management and employees work together in unison and total cooperation in order to achieve their desired goals. Beyond this, its emphasis in the workplace is on labour relations equilibrium and creation of conducive organizational environment responsive to dedication and commitment to accomplish the desirable set goals and objectives in the workplace. It is also perceived as a condition under which employees and management work together to achieve the company's vision and mission and create high level of employee satisfaction in organisations (Fadillah, Nur & Siti 2022). Suggestively, industrial harmony entails work circumstances where the active partners in the organisation eagerly and compliantly cooperate in pursuit of the attainment of corporate goals.

Theoretical Anchorage

The pluralist theory was adopted and used for anchoring of the problem under this present study. Its major proponents are Fox (1966) and Flanders (1965). The theory is a totalizing perspective and wide-ranging congeries of ideas about industrial relations and its out crop of industrial harmony in the workplace. As expounds by the pluralist theory, it advances the notion of resolution of conflicts rather than in its generation to ensure harmonious and cooperative relationship between labour and management in the workplace. According to Panda (2023), the theory is rooted in an inherent conflict which is inevitable, rational, functional and normal situation at the workplace, when resolved. Conversely, conflict in work relations when unresolved disrupts peace and efficiency which are inhibitive of goal accomplishment in workplaces. In order to develop industrial harmony, the conflict is dealt with through collective bargaining, which is viewed as very necessary if well managed (Hyginus, Amadi & Okoh, 2020). This vista perceives the work place as a coalition of competing interest between labour and management where the basic role of management is to mediate the stability of industrial relations as an intricate process and achieve industrial harmony through concession and compromise.

Relating this theory to study at hand, Fox (1966) in Armstrong (2014) argued that industrial relations is a pluralist society having a related but different interest which must be brought to equilibrium. This thus reinforces the value and legitimacy of collective bargaining as an element of industrial relations and an exceptional device for resolving relational problems between labour and management to achieve industrial harmony and institutional goals. In this connection, the pluralist theory sees employment relations as a sub-system of an organisation with conflict of interest between labour and management but which is harnessed through negotiation towards compromise and consensus. The mutual benefit derived from this situation often results in industrial harmony which is the nerve of the workplace and an essential pre-condition for organisational goal accomplishment. Most importantly, the pluralist theory holds that the workplace is governed by wide range of formal and informal rules and regulations which cover everything from employment, performance to goals attainment. The major critics of this theory are the marxists who still believe that exploitation will continue to thrive unabated in the institutional structure of pluralism. Nevertheless, the pluralist theory is all-embracing and an encompassing one with a far wider appeal to the understanding of the nexus between industrial relations and its rudiment of industrial harmony which are functional assets capable of accomplishing of institutional goals. Thus, the theory is seen as the most efficient means of institutionalizing employment rules in order to foster harmonious industrial relations in organised workplaces.

Developing Harmony in Industrial Relations: Aiding Factors

Industrial harmony is the highest growth prospect of industrial relations. Its development in work places is reliant on some influencing factors, which create a conducive organizational climate that can nurture the growth of industrial peace and harmonious relations. These factors also build up state of amity and precipitate stability in industrial relations, thereby, ensuring harmony in organizations. This means that the conditions in the place of work have far reaching effect on the outcome of industrial relations (Adigun 2014). Failure to develop harmony in industrial relations can make an organisation experience low trajectory of performance leading to major rift in goal accomplishment in the workplace. Redressing this condition in the workplace requires some aiding factors which include effective communication, employee involvement, labour management relations, mutual trust and human resource management practice.

Effective Communication

In all relationship, effective communication plays a crucial role between labour and management to grow harmony in the workplace. It is very vital to any organizational system as it can create an environment of trust, peace and concord. According to Alabi and Adenuga (2018), effective communication is the bind that keeps work organisations alive. As a live wire of relationship building and problem solver in the workplace, it helps to overcome work-related challenges and develop harmony in organizations. This suggests that through effective communication, organisational activities scroll correctly (Bucata &

Rizency, 2017), Without it, workplaces would be a muddle of employee grievances and disputes. The use of effective communication significantly reduces conflict in work relations and resolve same where it has developed to swell the level of harmony in organisations. Additionally, effective communication does not only resolve conflicts but leads to goals alignment, enhances values, uncovers latent opportunities and ultimately foster much stronger relationship between partners (Takor & Kumar, 2000 as cited in Akekue & kalu, 2017). In other words, all organisations rely on communication for their basic functioning (Musheke & Phiri, 2021). It is also very essential to employees' involvement as it serves as an impetus to achieve organizational set goals. Hence, for there to be industrial harmony in any organization, there must be effective communication (Mojaye &Dedekuma, 2015)

Employee Involvement

Employee involvement is a set of organisational practice aimed at achieving industrial harmony in work places. It is the extent to which employers allow its employees to be involved in organisational decision-making (Charles, Francis & Zirra, 2021). As an element of labour relations involving employees in the affairs that affect their organisations, it provides the opportunity to enhance good working relationships in the workplace environment. This facilitates peaceful coexistence between labour and management which is necessary for cultivation of industrial harmony. According to Benson and Lawler (2016), employee involvement is an approach to a work system that emphasises a high level of decision-making authority. This is usually advocated in the workplace due to the need for harmony and cooperation to facilitate goals accomplishment. Thus, it is intentionally implemented to increase collaboration and workplace harmony in organisations. Its practice in an organisational operation motivates the workforce and provides the scope for better relations in order to develop industrial harmony.

Labour Management Relations

Labour management relations is a strong indicator of an industrial relations system (Adekunle, Abimbola & Ehinmen 2019). As an internal arrangement between employee and employer in a bipartite relationship at the organisational level, it leverages the regulation of employment relations for the attainment of industrial harmony. In other words, labour management relations is a set of agreement to create a conducive organizational environment, which in turn, assists in the achievement of set corporate goals. As such, labour management relations is a tool of industrial peace and harmony in the workplace (Hassan, 2016). It actualizes this, by providing effective procedure for rule making, consistency in dealing with employees' related matters and fairness in organizations. Good working relationship from both labour and management provides the basis for the development of harmony in the work place and benefits organizations by creating harmonious atmosphere inside the business, which allows firm to achieves its goals (Wiehhan, 2021).

Mutual Trust

Mutual trust is a good pre-requisite for labour management relations which aids in the development of industrial harmony in workplaces. It is genuinely the achievement of relational consensus between labour and management in their bid to achieve harmony, preventing the exchange of explanation of the vulnerabilities of one and other as a result of opportunistic behaviour in organizations. Mutual trust is the psychological condition that affects the intention, expectation and behaviour of people (Zheng, Zhong & Wiang, 2018). Without it, industrial harmony, even if it is achieved, cannot be sustained for longer tenure. This makes mutual trust the positive expectation that group and individual in their decision they make (Kucukoglu & Akcam, 2021). In this regard, it reinforces the confidence that two or more parties who could be labour and management have for each other. According to Chalab and Al karanwi (2021). Mutual trust is the ending relationship between management and employees based on the ability of the parties to fulfill mutual obligation, credibility and goodwill towards each other as well as honesty and justice in dealings. Within this context, it is a means to grow industrial harmony in the workplace. Mutual trust is a key to a productive relationship which serves to mitigate conflict in work relationships. In essence, it contributes to inter organizational dyadic relationship, thereby, ensuring harmonious relationship in organization (Kim, Wang, & Chen, 2018).

Human Resource Management

Human resource management (HRM) is a sub-system of an organization (Thomas 2023). As a key organisational function, it influences industrial relations to foster the cultivation of industrial harmony. In this regard, HRM is seen as a set of activities used by organizations to manage their employees (Haubi & Islam, 2023). According to Al Adresi and Darum, (2017), organizations are now prioritising good HRM practices as a planned approach to establish open, flexible and caring management. These attributes serve as catalysts for the evolvment of industrial harmony in workplaces. Developing and implementing policies and procedures that support fairness, equity, and involvement are necessary to achieve industrial harmony. HRM is in a better position to offer these requirements as part of its motives in the workplace. Its key policies and procedures that contribute to the growth of workplace harmony include the recruitment and selection policy, grievance procedure system, conflict resolution and mediation policy, work-life balance initiatives, health and safety policy, and communication and collaboration policies. Its diagnostics methods indeed help in ensuring that only moderate amount of conflict in work relations thrives in organisations, giving room for healthy interaction among organisational members for the attainment of industrial harmony through effective collective bargaining practice, in the workplace.

Connecting Industrial Relations and Industrial Harmony or Goals Accomplishment Industrial relations and industrial harmony are two polar ends of goal attainment in work organisations. Both are functional assets that hold different values in the workplace but the connect of the two constructs can strengthen commitment to promote peaceful working arrangement between labour and management. They also ensure cordial and general agreement on work intimacy between employer and employee for mutual gain and co-existence in the work place (Ndubusi-Okolo, Oyeinzugbe & Anekwe 2022). These often facilitate effective use of resources both human and materials for the accomplishment of organizational goals. According to Rani, (2019), an organizational goal can be achieved only when organizations have the right people and provide them effective wins environment and training to gain competitive advantage. The positive practice of industrial relations as the nerve of industrial harmony involves showing fairness and equity to all stakeholders and recognizing the right of employees to take part in decision making in the workplace. This is to create an atmosphere of sound harmonious relations which is an essential pre-requisite for the achievement of corporate goals. These goals occupy a strategic position in the life of any organization and without industrial harmony which is an exceptional rudiment of industrial relations, their attainment might be strenuous. The blended communion of industrial relations and industrial harmony transmuted into harmonious industrial relations can drive deep the achievement of desirable goals in work places. They are also major ingredients that promote productivity and attainment of goals in an institution (Danraka, 2021).

According to Izidor (2018), good industrial relations is vital if industrial peace and harmony are to be experienced and sustained in the workplace. For that reason, acquiring harmonious relations is an element of organizational success, as it helps in competitiveness for goal attainment. In other words, industrial relations needs to be persistently orchestrated in an integrated manner as network of relationships and be in alliance with industrial harmony to ensure the accomplishment of goals in the work place. As such, the creation of sense of belongingness and group cohesiveness among employees are products of harmonious industrial relations, resulting in less industrial unrest and rare presence of discord. By promoting consistency, transparency, conflict resolution, effective communication, collaboration and accountability policies and procedures help to maintain harmonious relations in organisations (Ladan, 2012). Under these conditions, effective utilization of the workforce can be assured and tangible outcome of valuable performance can be achieved. Industrial relations must be established based on fairness, trust and mutual respect that can make employees to be motivated and loyal to facilitate them in achieving optimum result for their organization (Sahool & Sahool, 2018) Hence, work organisations with strong emphasis on harmonious industrial relations, have less workplace disruption and their employees will have better opportunities to take initiatives and make decisions which can help in the strive for corporate goals accomplishment.

Tamunobere and Tamanomiebi (2023), contented that industrial harmony is important because it promotes employee commitment which enables the achievement of organizational goals. Working towards the achievement of harmonious industrial relations in all context is to remove the discordance in labour-management relations and to ensure employee involvement in the smooth running of the organisations operations for facilitating and achieving desirable set goals. In this respect, the synergistic effect of the industrial relations and industrial harmony connects employee to the mission and vision of the work place, which is part of the desirable outcome in any corporate goal setting processes. More so that, the fulcrum of goal attainment in workplaces is often pivoted by the cultivation of harmonious industrial relations which brings about workforce commitment for the realization of corporate goal sustainability. Basically, good industrial harmony fosters development of the industrial system and ensures stability in the sphere of governance in the workplace (Girigiri & Badom, 2021). Therefore, developing harmony in industrial relations is a necessary condition for increased organizational efficiency and effectiveness, which in turn promotes the fulfilment of corporate goals.

Consequently, the attainment of corporate goals entails outlining and actualizing the model of harmoniousness in industrial relations for the creative input of every stakeholder in organized workplaces. However, the formulation of effective human resource management policies is the pivot on which harmoniousness in industrial relations revolves in the work place. These policies are guides for initiatives and actions in personnel matters (Adesubumi & Abolade, 2018). They are also germane to team-spirit, creativity and innovation among organizational members for achievement of set goals and objectives in workplaces. The search for competitive advantage further recognises the potential rewarding value of harmonious industrial relations as a praxis of promoting employee involvement. As a catalyst for work organizations to accomplish their set goals, the good services of employees are required and for labour to put in the best of their services, management must appreciate their efforts and provide good compensation and conducive working environment. It is on this basis, that we can talk of harmoniousness in industrial relations. What this implies is that the development of harmony in industrial relations workplace is a central theme for both management and employees in their joint endeavor to facilitate success through redressing concern for sustainable goal accomplishment in organisations. This tends to encourage collaborative work situations, drive productivity, and lead to excellent organizational performance (Tamunomiebi & Eke, 2020).

However, the existence of harmony in industrial relations can be only assured when both labour and management cooperate to achieve the set organizational goals, without any obstruction or distraction to the smooth operation of the workplace. As such, it is important that the relationship between labour and management remains a healthy one as the success of organizations and general economic development depended on harmonious industrial relations (Izimi, 2015). This makes industrial relations to be strategically focused and located to generate reasonable degree of industrial harmony when effectively practiced for goal accomplishment in the workplace. The reciprocal fit between industrial harmony and industrial relations produces rare industrial action, non-frivolous dispute in labour and management relations and right place for employees' involvement to make the realization of goal attainment feasible. Within this formation, the compassion that dwells in the two constructs ultimately becomes a means of galvanizing the work force to the achievement of corporate set goals. In contrast however, its absence creates problem of strained relationship and frivolous employees' grievances which are inimical to goal accomplishment in the work place. Therefore, work organisations achieve economically and optimally their set goals when both employees and management increase jointly their capacity for developing harmonious industrial relations in an emergent economy like Nigeria

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study has attempted to show that industrial relations is an enormous fact in the pursuit of industrial harmony in workplaces. Both constructs serve as a value-adding resource, transforming into harmonious industrial relations when effectively practiced and this development of harmonious industrial relations

reinforces the cooperation between labour and management in building a supportive workplace climate for the achievement of set corporate goals. It has also been emphasised that harmoniousness in industrial relations creates a synergy between labour and management that positively affects the workplace to ensure total performance optimisation for goal accomplishment. Given its motives, we maintained that harmonious industrial relations connect the workplace to its mission to stimulate the attainment of corporate goals by creating a conducive work environment for better organizational stability and functionality. Thus, by creating a conducive work environment significantly fosters dyadic relationship and upholds harmonious relations for preventing emergent conflicts in the workplace. This serves to expand the compliance effort of the workforce for goal accomplishment. In this manner, harmonious industrial relations offer labour and management the chance to identify with one another, display high opinions of each other ideas and also generate a workable method of running the affairs of organizations to achieve lofty set goals. Conclusively, the phenomenon of harmonious industrial relations is not the absence of disagreement but it is when there is an understanding between employees and employers that permit the system to achieve its set goals (Ogunola, 2018).

In the light of the foregoing discourse, the following recommendations are desirable as a way of making the connection between industrial harmony and industrial relations feasible to achieve favourable corporate goal accomplishment in Nigerian workplaces. Management must formulate an effective labour relations policy to ensure a stable and productive workplace that depends largely on harmonious industrial relations for purposes of corporate goal accomplishment. Realistic and progressive attitudes by management to demonstrate the open-endedness of harmonious industrial relations must be adopted, whereby the right of employees to raise grievances is recognized and respected to ensure mutual cooperation between employees and management in the workplace.

The development of an effective conflict management system must be prioritized by establishing and utilizing appropriate machinery for speedy redresses of employees' grievances to create an organisational system where employees feel involved and the richness of their ideas is harnessed to build value and develop harmony in industrial relations in the workplace. The use of effective organisational communication channel which encourages social dialogue must be constantly expanded and made use of on a regular basis to make employees work with ownership and overcome emerging challenges that may be inhibitive of set corporate goals. Again, this study supports that management must embrace a more inclusive and participative approach in the running of organisations' operations making use of employees' input and feedback and creating a work culture that is based on a collaborative stance for goal accomplishment in the workplace.

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