

Collective Bargaining: Its Influence on Workers' Effectiveness in Nigerian Public Sector

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Abstract:

This work aimed at determining some specific implications of collective bargaining in the effectiveness of workers among Nigerian public sector-organizations. The abysmal performance of workers as epitomized by poor overall output of the public sector-organizations constitutes the major problem that necessitated the conduct of this study. To facilitate accumulation of relevance secondary data as the basis for establishing conceptual framework, pertinent literature were explored. This work revealed among others that effective collective bargaining breeds atmosphere of mutual trust, confidence, cooperation and harmonious relationships among employers, managements, and workers, hence, fostering increased workers' morale and commitment toward meeting performance targets of public organizations.

Key words: *Collective bargaining, Influence, Workers' effectiveness, Public sector, Nigeria.*

I. INTRODUCTION

In Nigeria, the cradle of formal negotiation machinery towards fostering understandable relationships between workers and management could be traced to the early organized work entities established by the colonial masters. The perceived persistent apathy and lack of trust on the part of employers in respecting terms and conditions of employment led to expressions of labour grievances at different dimensions, with serious negative consequences on the productivity and profitability of the public firms. The need to build and sustain industrial harmony in the public organizations became imperative, and the effective means to achieve this was through collective bargaining. The practices of public sector collective bargaining are modeled after the private sector collective bargaining in most developed societies. In Nigeria, the reverse is the case as collective bargaining gained its roots in the public sector owing to the near absence of private sector at the turn of the century [1].

II. THE PROBLEM

The abysmal performance of workers noticeable through the poor overall output in the public-sector firms in Nigeria constitutes the problem which necessitated embarking on this work.

III. METHODOLOGY

In order to gather data from secondary sources, so as to enhance establishment of conceptual direction, it became imperative to employ survey design that facilitated exploration of the work of selected authors.

IV. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A. *The concept of collective bargaining*

Collective bargaining involves a process of consultation and negotiation of terms and conditions of employment between employers and workers, usually through their representatives. It involves a situation where the workers union or representatives meet with the employer or representatives of employer in an atmosphere of mutual cooperation and respect to deliberate and reach agreement on the demands of workers concerning certain improvements in the terms and conditions of employment [2]. Collective bargaining is the process of negotiation on a whole range of issues bordering employment between workers and employers or government, aimed at collective agreement [3].

It has been discovered to be the instrument to which the unilateral decisions and actions of employers and government could be minimized. Collective bargaining in the context of industrial relations, is the process whereby procedures are jointly agreed and wages and conditions of employment are settled by negotiations between employers, or associations of employers, and workers' organizations [4]. Apart from being taken as a means of arriving at an agreement, collective bargaining could also be regarded as a method of settlement of disputes [5]. Collective bargaining machinery in Nigeria has performed relatively poorly due to the uniqueness and employment practices of government as an employer of labour [6].

B. *Features of collective bargaining*

Major features of collective bargaining [4]:

1. the emphasis on collective action, not on individual action
2. the concern both with rule-making and with the settlement of employment conditions

3. the aim, as in every forum of bargaining, is to reach agreement eventually
4. the interests of parties to collective bargaining are not identical, and therefore conflict of interests is assumed
5. the voluntary nature of the activity, i.e. it is not imposed by law.

It is worthy of note that effective collective bargaining could be deterred by an atmosphere of bargaining impasse. Bargaining impasse is the situation that occurs when the parties involved in negotiations are unable to move further toward settlement [7].

C. The theories of collective bargaining

Three major theories of collective bargaining [8]:

1) Tradition theory

This theory considers economic condition in every nation as a major determinant of who wins in a negotiation between management and workers. In other words, economic forces determine who will be favoured in the negotiation of wages and salaries between employers and unions. When the supply of labour is higher than demand, employers will win, this indicates a situation of high level of unemployment in the economy; but if demand for labour is higher than supply of labour, workers stand the chance of winning. Another perspective of this theory is based on the argument that if the procedure and rules of the game is strictly followed, it becomes easy to reach a collective agreement.

2) Power model theory

The argument behind power model theory is that the greater the demand that is made, the less power, union or employer will have in actualizing it.

In other words, this theory says that if maximum/upper limit of demand is 5 and the union is asking for it, the probability of getting it is less than if they were asking for 2 or 3. The theory concluded that if people want to win in any negotiation, they must make less power of their opponent to disagree. Consequently, if a trade union wants to embark on strike and the management is aware that the consequences of such strike is likely to be devastating to them, they may quickly agree with the union's demand and vice versa.

3) Behavioral aspect theory

This theory is based on the fact that, the more cordial the social and interpersonal relationship, co-operation and attitudinal disposition between management and workers is high, the tendency to reach collective agreement without much hassle in the firm.

D. Functions of collective bargaining

The relevance of collective bargaining to different parties [8]:

1) Functions to the Worker

- Collective bargaining is the alternative to and a replacement of individual's weak attempt at bargaining with his or her employer.
- It affords the workers an opportunity to participate in the management functions of their organizations. The absence of collective bargaining means that managerial prerogative would dominate most labour matters.
- It is the process of making rules that govern the work-place jointly by both management and the union.

2) Function of the employer

- It saves the cost of negotiating with each individual worker.
- Salary and wage administration system is made simple.
- Motivation and co-operation is enhanced when rules are jointly authored, as people willing and easily comply with them.
- It tends to avoid comparability issues which may be raised by workers if individual bargaining had been used. That is to say that duplication and repetition are avoided.
- It leads to industrial peace and thus saves the embarrassment and costs of strike action.
- It provides grievance procedure, which prevents the deployment of multiple standards by management in treating indiscipline in the organization.

3) Functions to the state

- It prevents negative effects of visible expression of conflicts.
- It minimizes the need for state intervention and therefore ensures industrial democracy in an organization.
- Quick resolution of conflict through collective bargaining removes political instability.

E. Forms of collective bargaining

The five main forms of collective bargaining explained thus [9]:

- 1) Discussions that take place between the government, the employers and the workers within an established machinery to device policies to certain matters like inflation, unemployment, and to advise government on

relevant labour legislation. Bodies established for such functions are the Prices, Productivity and Income Board (PPIB) and National Labour Advisory Council (NLAC). The agreements reached with are forwarded to the government as recommendations.

- 2) Government discussions and consultations with employers and trade unions on some social and economic problems e.g. provisions of proposed labour legislation, introduction of an income policy, etc. No established bodies are used and no formal agreements are reached but the contributions of the parties are noted.
- 3) Discussions held as part of work-level consultations. The discussions result in agreement, that may or may not be implemented in practice.
- 4) Agreements on procedures for settling labour disputes. This aimed at getting discussions on disputes between the two parties going so that, the contributions of both mediators or conciliators can be used for settlement.
- 5) The actual bargaining process with the obligation to negotiate in good faith; to barn certain practices that might impede the bargaining process.

V. THE EFFECT OF COLLECTIVE BARGAINING ON WORKER'S EFFECTIVENESS IN NIGERIAN PUBLIC SECTOR

Worker's performance in the public sector, to a great extent depends on employer's or government commitment and respect to agreements reached with the labour unions regarding improvements in conditions and terms of employment.

Work environment with culture of mutual trust breeds confidence, co-operation and harmonious relationships among the relevant parties (employers, management, and workers). This kind of atmosphere fosters increased workers' morale and commitment to meeting performance targets of the firm or organization.

Sincerity on the part of employers and unions in the resolve to reach collective agreement reduces tensions, strikes, confrontations, lock-outs and other industrial actions capable of endangering and impeding industrial peace and frustrating organizational efforts toward goal attainment.

Collective agreements lead to workers avoidance of dissipating energies in planning and development of combat and confrontational strategies against employers or government. Over-indulgence in union activities by workers has the potency to scuttle productivity and inefficiency.

Better condition and terms of employment borne out of collective agreement can facilitate optimal performance of workers in public-sector organizations thus, boosting the nation's Gross Domestic Products (GDP) and economic development.

The reverse would be the case in all the facts highlighted above if the relevant stakeholders are not committed to the entrenchment of effective collective bargaining machinery and respect to terms and conditions jointly reached. Also, the functions of collective bargaining to the various parties mentioned above would not be attainable under condition of bargaining impasse.

VI. CONCLUSION

The demand of workers for fair treatment from their employers or government in Nigeria is as old as the birth of organized firms which dated back to the colonial era. The persistent failure on the part of employers or their representatives and government to discharge their legitimate obligations owed workers, as well as to respect the terms and conditions of employment jointly reached, often pave way for strike actions in the public service. The process in which employers or representatives of employers, or government and the workers union jointly agree on procedures, wages and conditions of employment is termed collective bargaining. The nature of collective bargaining in Nigeria has substantial correlation with the performance of workers, the public sector organizations and the economy.

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