

THE CAUSES, EFFECTS AND MANAGEMENT OF INDUSTRIAL CONFLICT IN LOCAL GOVERNMENTS OF DELTA STATE, NIGERIA, 2008-2014

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Abstract

The main thrust of this study is to identify the causes and effects of industrial conflicts in Delta State Local Governments, as well as examine effective communication as a strategy for industrial conflict management in the Local Governments. The study was carried out within the period of 2008-2014 in local governments of Delta State. The study adopts Vroom Expectancy theory as its theoretical framework of analysis. The study used interview and questionnaire to elicit data. A total of 346 copies of questionnaire were successfully retrieved out of the 360 copies of questionnaire evenly administered on the sample population of the three selected local governments in the state. The generated data were presented in a table and percentage frequency. The findings showed that communication gap among the parties in labour relations, non-payment of staff salaries and other entitlements, exclusion of labour union officials in decision making process, among others, as the causes of industrial conflict, and the industrial conflict has both negative and positive effects on the local government service in the state. The study further proved effective communication as a vital strategy for industrial conflict management in the local governments. In our recommendations, we proffered more strategies for the management and resolution of industrial conflict in the local governments of Delta State, as approach to achieve a better industrial relations and productivity in the Local Governments in the state.

Keywords: Labour Relations, Parties, Communication, Industrial Conflict, Strategy

Introduction

Local government is an important and the closest tier of government to the rural people, charged with the mandate of developing the rural area and the people therein in Nigeria. To achieve the mandate, Wilson (2013:136) stated that the local governments in Nigeria had enjoyed several reforms aimed at repositioning them for effective service delivery to the rural people. The reform dates back to the colonial era, and climaxed in 1976, with defined functions, powers, structures, and personnel. Abonyi (2010:90) holds that Federal Government in collaboration with the State Governments embarked on extensive local government reforms with the view of establishing a defined carrier service in the local governments. In addition, the Ibrahim Babangida administration in 1988 had a specific reform for the local government service, centered on professionalization of the service, and creation of mandatory departments and

agencies for the smooth operations of the local governments. To further strengthen the local governments, the 1979 and 1999 constitutions of Nigeria, recognized local government as a tier of government with basic responsibilities and defined structure of administration. The implications of the reforms are that local governments, including Delta State Local Governments are empowered with necessary resources and agencies for effective operation of the local government service.

However, despite the various reforms, it appears the Delta State Local Governments are not functioning effectively due to regular industrial conflicts in the service. Various local governments in the state have experienced one form of industrial conflict or the other, and this affects the operations of the local government service. Although, as a workplace, industrial conflict is inevitable due to the rising wave of individual and group interests' in the service. Onyeonoru (2005) stated that industrial conflict is all about expression of dissatisfaction with the employment contract and collective bargaining. While Otobo (2000) opines that industrial conflict reflects the height of inability of the parties in industrial relations system (employees, employers, and even the state) to reach agreement on any issue connected with the object of employer-employees interactions; Bagshow (1998) observes that conflict arises due to competition for jobs, resources, power, acknowledgement and security, and it is challenging because it arouses primitive emotions, such as people feeling threatened. Ogunbameru and Oribabor (2000) added that industrial conflict occur whenever there is a clash of interest between the employees and employer, and is expressed in different terms such as strike action, industrial unrest, trade dispute, etc. Robert, Okamoto and Lodge (1979) categorized the causes of industrial conflicts into two as economic and non-economic factors. The economic factors include such matters relating to compensation such as wages, bonus, allowances, and conditions for work such as working hours, leave, holidays without pay, unjust layoff, and retrenchment. While the non-economic factors are victimization of workers, ill treatment of staff, indiscipline, political factors, sympathetic strikes etc. These economic and non-economic factors are issues of concern in industrial conflicts in local governments.

In Delta State Local Government service, the three parties involved in the labour relations and industrial conflicts are the employees represented by their labour union, Nigeria Union of Local Government Employees (NULGE), the employer represented by Local Government Council Management, and the State represented by the Local Government Service Commission (LGSC). These parties have different interests at different time in the service. These interests include resource allocation, staff promotion, staff welfare, prompt payment of salaries and allowances etc. Attempt by individuals or groups to prevent the other from achieving their interest normally leads to clash of interest culminating in industrial conflict in the local government service. Donais (2006) sees industrial conflict as normal in every organization, particularly such public organization as the local government. Industrial conflict yields both positive and negative results, depending on the perspective of the conflict. However, in the case of Delta State, the industrial conflict has been quite challenging to the local governments, as it has severally affected their productive capacity. As a way out, Wilson and Ibietan (2013:135) see effective communication as the fulcrum of all activities in the local government system and could be used as a strategy of resolving industrial conflicts. This study tends to adopt the views of Wilson and

Ibietan (2013), as the study will discuss effective communication as a variable for industrial conflict management in Delta State Local Government service within the period 2008-2014.

Statement of the Problem

Many scholars, including Onor (2005), Obike and Nwaodu (2010:60), and Wilson (2013: 137) argue that local governments have been empowered and encouraged with necessary resources, including human and financial, to achieve effective service delivery capacity. Practitioners alike have similar view and perception that local governments have been positioned for efficient productivity. Unfortunately, it appears the Delta State local government service is associated with one form of industrial conflict or the other, thereby leading to low productivity and strained relationship among parties in the service. The industrial conflicts are generated on account of either economic or non economic factors. These conflicts have devastating effects on the local governments and the parties in the industrial relations. However, Wilson and Ibietan (2013), and Onyeoziri (2005:15) stated that industrial conflict could be managed in every organization including local governments when there is effective communication among the parties in the industrial relations in the local governments. This involves adequate communication of service policies and organizational objectives among the parties. In the light of the above, it is necessary to raise the following research questions to guide the study:

- What are the causes of industrial conflict in Delta State Local Government?
- What are the effects of industrial conflict on the local government service?
- Could effective communication be used as a strategy for conflict industrial management in Delta State local government service?

Objectives of the Study

Obasi (2000) stated that the importance of any study is determined by its impact on the existing body of knowledge in the area of the study, and to further serve as a working guide for scholars and practitioners in future study. This research on causes, effects and management of industrial conflict in local governments of Delta State is timely arising from the constant conflicts bedeviling the local government service in Nigeria, with its attendant effects on local government productivity. The study makes contributions to, and advance knowledge on causes, effects and issues of communication and industrial conflict management. The study will benefit both the members of the academia and practitioners of local government administration, as it will make necessary contributions on how to achieve a better communication approach for industrial harmony in the local governments. Based on the above, the study has the following specific objectives:

- To identify the causes and effects of industrial conflict in Delta State local governments service.
- To investigate the extent effective communication can be used as a strategy for industrial conflict management in local governments.

Scope of the Study

The research was conducted in local governments of Delta State, Nigeria, within the period of 2008-2014. The study used three local governments namely, Patani in Southern

Senatorial District, Isoko South in Central Senatorial District, and Aniocha South in Northern Senatorial District as pilot local governments, and the data generated from the three local governments were generalized for the entire local governments in Delta State. This research centered on examining the causes and effects of industrial conflict in Delta State local governments, and investigating effective communication as a strategy for industrial conflict management in the local governments.

Area of the Study

Delta State is one of the 36 states of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, created in 1991, with administrative headquarters at Asaba. It is an oil rich state in the Niger Delta region, with a land mass of 17, 698sqkm, and a population of 4,112,445 (NPC,2006). The state has 25 local governments, with three senatorial districts namely, Southern, Northern, and Central Senatorial Districts. The state is currently governed by Dr. Emmanuel EwetaUduaghan of the Peoples Democratic Party. The local governments are administered by elected chairmen. The three local governments selected for the study are Patani from the Southern, Isoko South from the Central, and Aniocha South from the Northern Senatorial District. Patani Local Government was created in 1996, with administrative headquarters at Patani and has a population of 67,707 (NPC, 2006). The Patani Local Government Council is one of the Ijaw speaking local governments in the state, and has a staff strength of 536 (LGSC, 2014). Isoko South Local Government was created in 1991 with administrative headquarters at Oleh and a population of 235,147 (NPC, 2006). The Isoko South Local Government Council has staff population of 546 (LGSC, 2014). Aniocha South Local Government was created in 1991 with administrative headquarters at Ogwashi-Uku and has a population of 140,604 (NPC, 2006). The Council has a staff population of 675. All the local governments are charged with the mandate of administering the affairs of the rural people and the development of the rural areas. The achievement of the mandate is determined by the operational system of the local governments, through the activities of various parties – staff, management, and LGSC.

Conceptual Review

Industrial Conflict Management

Waish (2008) stated that conflict is a common reality in every workplace due to constant interaction of human beings in the organization. Human interaction has the capacity of resulting in conflict, particularly, when it involves the interactions of people from different backgrounds, origins, qualifications working together in a particular industry. Workers have different values, interest, and demands, with the expectation that their demands should be attended to individually or collectively. In pursuit of their demands, conflict emerges in the workplace, including local government. Ubeku (1998) collaborates the fact that conflict is a sequence of interactions between individuals, and groups and government in the society. Henry (2009) added that industrial conflict is the dispute that arises due to incompatibility of people's interests, goals, and values in the workplace. However, industrial conflict could be managed. Albert and Watson

(2002) see conflict management as the application of the principle that not all conflict can be resolved, rather learn how to manage the conflicts and reduce the odds of non productive increase. This is in line with the view of Donais (2014), which posits that when conflict is managed, it creates opportunity for parties to learn more on workplace relations and enhances workplace productivity. So conflict management is required in every workplace, including Delta State local governments. Upon the above, the study sees industrial conflict management as the process where all the parties involved in industrial relations come together to agree on the modalities to reduce the negative perspectives and increase the positive perspectives of the industrial conflict to enhance productivity in the local governments.

Effective Communication

Communication is an important tool in every organization, and is used to convey the organizational goals and mobilise necessary variables to achieve these goals. Hence, no organization functions without effective communication. Eghe (2003:213) sees communication as the process of creating, transmitting and interpreting ideas, facts, opinions, and feelings between two or more persons. Similarly, Robins (2000:284) stated that communication is the process of transmitting an idea or thought in such a way that the mental picture perceived by the receiver is exactly the same as that envisioned by the sender. The above implies that there is an interaction between more than one person in the organization, where ideas are transmitted from one person to another with the aim of achieving a particular objective. Stoner, et al. (2000) clearly identified two forms of communication in the organization, namely, formal or vertical communication and informal or horizontal communication. Formal communication is a form of communication that involves transmission of organizational policies from the superior to the subordinates, and such other information as necessary for the organization. It is a downward form of communication. Informal communication is more of oral communication, face-to-face, and provides necessary information outside the formal lines of authority, and is faster in communicating organizational policies to members of the organization. Communication is important in the local government service, as it provides the enabling environment for the parties in the labour relations to convey their decisions and interests to the other. Its effectiveness encourages better industrial relations, and its failure enhances industrial conflict in the local government.

Theoretical Framework of Analysis

This study adopts the Vroom expectancy theory as a theoretical framework of analysis. The theory was developed by Victor H. Vroom in 1964 in course of his study on staff motivation and management in the workplace. The theory sees motivation as a propelling force that drives the workers attitude and relations, and influences their job performance in the organization. According to Oliver (1974) “expectancy is the probability that the individual assigns to work effort being followed by a given level of achieved task performance”. Upon the above, Oliver (1974) adds that expectancy theory proposes how an individual desire to believe or act in a certain way because they are motivated to select a specific behaviour over other behaviours due

to what they expect as a result of the selected behaviour. Chen and Fang (2008) see expectancy theory as explanation of workers motivation, which is dependent upon the perceived association between performance and output and how individuals modify their behaviour based on their calculated anticipated outcomes. This theory explains motivation as a factor to the workers response to management decisions in the workplace. The workers behaviour is a product of their conscious choice of action aimed at maximizing their positive expectations. However, when the workers expectations are not met, the workers attitude changes, and could result to industrial crisis in the workplace.

Expectancy theory uses three basic variables to express workers attitude in the workplace. These are Expectancy (the workers belief that their effort will result in attainment of desired performance goals); Instrumentality (the belief that if you perform well, a valued outcome will be received) ; and Valence (the value an individual places on the rewards of an outcome, which is based on their needs, goals, values and services of motivation). Although this theory is no devoid of criticisms, as such critics as Lawler (1971), Porter and Lawler (1968)etc see the theory as being too simplistic in nature in addressing workers attitude in the workplace.

The application of this theory to this study is based on its relevance in the analysis of local government workers attitude and response to their expectations from the management in the local government service of Delta State. Obviously, the local government workers like any civil/public servant in Nigeria is full of expectations from the management, which affects their performance in the service. Such expectations are the motivational forces, which include regular salaries, promotions, effective communication between the workers and management, payment of allowances, training and retraining etc. These motivational factors affect the workers attitude and performance in the local government. When these expectations are met, the workers are at peace with the management, but when on the contrary, the workers resort to industrial crisis as medium to address their expectations and demands and this affects the workers attitude and productivity in the local governments. Indeed, the level of workers motivation affects their performance and relations in the workplace, including local governments.

Data Collection

Our study adopts the survey research design. In his view, Oppenheim (1992) stated that survey is a planned collection of data over a large area for the purpose of analyzing the relationships between variables. The population of this study consists of the entire staff, political office holders, and NULGE officials in the Local Governments of Delta State. Three (3) local governments were selected, with each representing a senatorial district in the state. The local governments are Patani, Isoko South, and Aniocha South. The choice of these local governments is based on Unified Local Government Service structure, and the associated industrial challenges in all local governments in Delta State. The study in any of the local governments would be used to generalize in other local governments of the state. The study used interview and questionnaire instrument to collect data on issues of causes, effects and effective communication as a tool for industrial conflict management in the local governments. A total of 360 copies of questionnaire were administered randomly in the selected 3 local governments, representing 120 copies of questionnaire per local government. A total of 351 copies of questionnaire were successfully retrieved from the respondents, out of which 5 copies of questionnaires were mutilated and

discarded, bringing a total of 346 copies of questionnaire as useful for the study. The questionnaire was segmented into 5 sections, with 1 and 2 designed to show the respondents' data and questionnaire distribution figure respectively, while the other 3 sections were each designed to answer a specific research question of the study. There are 28 items on the subject matter in the questionnaire to address the three research questions. The researcher also had interview with some local government functionaries on the subject matter. The interview generated additional data for the study. The collected data were presented and analysed in a tabular and percentage frequency.

Data Presentation and Discussion of Findings

Table 1: Sex, Service and Educational distribution of Respondents

1	Sex Distribution of the respondents	No. of Questionnaire	Percentage
	Male	158	45.7
	Female	188	54.3
2	Service distribution of respondents		
	Established staff	176	50.9
	Political staff	86	24.9
	Union Officials	84	24.2
3	Educational Qualifications of Respondents		
	Below HND/Bachelor Degree	164	47.4
	HND/Bachelor Degree	142	41
	Above HND/Bachelor Degree	40	11.6

Source : Field work, 2014

The table 1 above shows that 158 questionnaire representing 45.7% were administered to the male, and 188 questionnaire representing 54.3% of the total questionnaire were administered to the female. In service distribution, established staff had 50.9%, political staff had 24.9%, and union officials had 24.2% of the questionnaire. In educational qualifications, more respondents had HND/B.Sc and above representing 52.6%, and those below HND/B.Sc had 47.4%. The implications of the above table are that the study had more female respondents than male, more established staff than the political and union officials put together, and more of the respondents had HND/B.Sc and above.

Table 2: Questionnaire Distribution

S/N	Senatorial Districts	Local Governments	No. of questionnaire Distributed	No. of questionnaire retrieved without error
1	Central	Isoko South	120	120
2	Southern	Patani	120	114

3	Northern	Aniocha South	120	112
	Total		360	346

Source: Field work, 2014

The table 2 above shows that the three (3) selected local governments were evenly sampled with equal number of questionnaire. However, the number of successfully retrieved questionnaire varied, as Isoko South, Patani, and Anioma South had 120, 114 and 112 respectively.

Question 1: What are the causes of industrial conflict in Delta State Local Governments?

In answering the above question, data will be collected from the respondents' responses on the causes of industrial conflict in Delta State Local Governments, as shown in table 3 below.

Table 3: The respondents' perception on the causes of industrial conflicts in Delta State Local Governments

S/N	Causes	Frequency	Percentage
1	Delay in payment of staff salaries	50	14.5
2	Imposition of decisions on employees by the management	37	10.7
3	Communication gap between NULGE, management, and LGSC	59	17
4	Delay in implementation of government circular on staff welfare	41	11.8
5	Delay in implementation of staff promotions	39	11.3
6	Inability of the management to honour labour – management agreements	40	11.6
7	Non payment of allowances and other entitlements due the staff	42	12.1
8	Non inclusion of the labour union officials in decision making on personnel management issues	38	11
	Total	346	100

Source: Field work, 2014

The table 3 above identified the causes of industrial conflict in Delta State Local Governments. The study proved eight (8) factors as the principal causes of industrial conflict in the local governments, with each factor possessing a degree of percentage of the respondents' perceptions on the issue. The table shows communication gap between the NULGE leadership, Council Management, and LGSC as the most prominent cause of the conflict with 17%, while delay in payment of staff salaries, and non-payment of allowances and other entitlements due the staff have 14.5%, and 12.1% respectively. This shows that inadequate communication between the

parties and breakdown in negotiation of issues affecting the parties, as well as non-payment of legitimate entitlements to staff as the causes of industrial conflict in the state. This corroborates our interview findings, which prove that staffers of some of the Councils are owed up to three months salaries and arrears of other entitlements. This irregular payment discourages the staff and prompts the NULGE leadership to resort to industrial action, particularly when there is inadequate explanation from the Council management. Our findings show that the above factors were responsible for the strike action embarked by NULGE in Ika South, Aniocha South, and Isoko South Local Government Councils in February, 2014. The table 3 further shows that delay in implementation of establishment circulars on staff welfare, inability of the management to honour labour-management agreements, and delay in implementation of staff promotion have 11.8%, 11.6%, and 11.3% respectively. The study noted that both the local government council management and LGSC pay less attention to workers welfare and demands, and these gave rise to grievances by the workers and subsequent industrial conflicts as evidenced in the industrial crisis at Patani, Aniocha South, Ethiope East and Warri South Local Governments in March, 2014. Other findings as shown in table 3 are the management imposition of decisions on the staff, and exclusion of the NULGE officials in personnel management decisions of the Councils, representing a total of 22.3% of the respondents perceptions on the causes of industrial conflicts in the local governments in Delta State.

Question 2: What are the effects of industrial conflict on the local government’s service?

To answer the above question, data was collected from the respondents’ responses on the effects of industrial conflict on the local governments as shown in table 4 below..

Table 4 :The respondents’ perception on the effects of industrial conflicts on Delta State Local Governments.

S/N	The effects of industrial conflicts	Frequency	Percentage
	Negative Impacts		
1	Waste of resources – time and financial	36	10.4
2	Strained relationship	29	8.4
3	Poor productivity in the councils	32	9.2
4	Absence from duty	40	11.6
5	Breakdown of civil service rules in the local governments	38	11
6	Breakdown of communication among the parties	41	11.8
			62.4%
	Positive Impacts		
7	Learning new conflict management skills in the local governments	32	9.2
8	Consideration of workers demands	28	8.2
9	Improvement in communication strategies among the parties	32	9.2

10	Resulting to wider consultation among the parties	38	11
			37.6%
	Total	346	100

Source: Field work, 2014

Table 4 above categorized the effects of industrial conflict on Delta State local governments into two, as negative and positive effects. Cumulatively, the negative effects have 62.4% of the total respondents’ perceptions on the effects of industrial conflicts on the local governments. These negative effects include waste of economic resources; strained relationship among the parties in the industrial relations; low productivity; breakdown in communication among the parties; and absence from duty. Upon the above, it is clear that industrial conflict is by no means a good omen in the local governments. In another perspective, the study showed that industrial conflicts have some positive effects on the local governments. Such effects include its contribution to improved communication strategy among the parties, need for wider consultations among the parties, learning new conflict management strategy/skill in the local governments, and consideration of workers demand by the management while negotiating to resolve the conflict. These positive effects have 37.6% of the total respondents’ perceptions on the effects of industrial conflicts on the local governments. Apparently, the study proves that the industrial conflict has more negative effects than positive effects on the local governments.

Question 3: Could effective communication be used as a strategy for industrial conflict management in Delta State Local Governments?

To answer the above question, data will be collected from the respondents’ responses in table 5 below on issues of effective communication and conflict management in local governments.

Table 5 : Respondents’ perception on effective Communication as a strategy for industrial conflict management in local governments.

S/N	Communication and conflict management in local governments	Frequency	Percentage
1	Regular staff-management meeting	47	13.6
2	Regular dialogue among the parties on labour relation matters in the local government	45	13
3	Education of the staff on new management policies	41	11.8
4	Notification of the staff on new service rules	42	12.1
5	Regular review of labour – management agreements on staff welfare	39	11.3
6	Effective listening process of complains from individuals/groups by the parties	50	14.5
7	Regular evaluation of the communication process among the parties	40	11.6
8	Conveyance of demands and grievances to	40	11.6

	the parties for dialogue before taking industrial action		
	Total	346	100

Source: Field work, 2014

In table 5 above, communication is shown as an important strategy for industrial conflict management in local governments of Delta State, Nigeria. Communication had eight (8) variables as strategies for conflict management. Such variables are listening process of complain from both individuals/groups, regular staff-management meeting, and regular dialogue among the parties having 14.5%, 13.6%, and 13% respectively of the total respondents perceptions on communication as a strategy for conflict management. Our findings proved that effective listening to workers complain by the management and LGSC is capable of resolving impending industrial crisis in the local government, and regular staff-management meeting on issues of staff grievances is necessary to create room for dialogue to resolve conflicting issues and reduce industrial conflict. The study observed that these strategies were applied in November, 2013 at Oshimili South and Ndokwa East Local governments, and various workers grievances were resolved amicably without further conflict. Other findings of the study shows that notification of the staff on new service rules and education of the staff on new management policies have 12.1% and 11.8% of the total responses respectively. Our interview also proved that when workers are adequately educated on new personnel management policies and service rules, it gives the management a better opportunity to implement same without much resistance from the workers. Our findings further show that regular evaluation of the communication process among the parties, and regular review of labour-management agreements are important strategies for industrial conflict management in the local governments.

Recommendations

This study made some recommendations on modalities to achieve effective industrial relations in Nigerian local governments, using communication as a medium. The recommendations are:

- Labour –management agreements on personnel management issues should be documented and duly signed by all the parties with copies made available to all parties to avoid deviation from the terms of agreements during implementation.
- Such agreements should also be reviewed regularly in line with the trend of events in the local government in particular and Nigerian economy at large.
- There is need for regular dialogue among the parties on policy issues to discard the fear of marginalization by each party.
- There should be intensified efforts to re-orientate the staff and management on the contemporary approaches to conflict management, and the use of effective communication to achieve conflict free workplace.
- The local government functionaries and NULGE should avoid issues that would result to negative effects of the conflict by applying effective communication in operations of the Councils.

- The management should always give adequate information to the workers and NIULGE if there is need for delay in payment of salaries and other entitlements. This will reduce the conflict that may arise from such delay.
- The management and LGSC should involve NULGE officials in the local governments in making strategic policies on personnel matters. This will enhance easy implementation of the policies without much resistance.
- LGSC should always ensure prompt implementation of staff promotions and other welfare circulars, and communicate same to the staff and NULGE to avoid agitation over such issues.
- There should be regular and wider consultation among the parties on issues of workers welfare.

Conclusion

The study is timely and beneficial to both the academia and practitioners of the local governments. The study established that non-payment of staff legitimate entitlements, deprivation of workers welfare needs, communication gap among the parties, exclusion of NULGE officials in personnel policy making and implementation process are among others, the causes of industrial conflict in the local governments. The industrial conflict has both negative and positive effects on the local government administration. The study affirmed effective communication as a vital tool to manage industrial conflict in the local governments. This requires the application of necessary communication processes and negotiations among the labour relation parties in the local governments. When the study recommendations are adequately applied in the labour relations process in the local governments, industrial conflicts would be adequately managed to achieve efficient local government service in Nigeria.

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