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INFORMATION MANAGEMENT AND INDUSTRIAL HARMONY FOR ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Harmony remains an inevitable aspect both in human societies and industries. Where there are unrests and chaos, meaningful progress and productivity will be negatively affected. In order to maintain peaceful coexistence there is the need for an effective communication system within any organization. Good and positive management of information in both horizontal and vertical directions will no doubt impact on peaceful coexistence among all relevant stakeholders – management, workers and labour leaders. The recurrence of industrial conflicts in the Nigerian labour industry has in so many ways hampered the economic development of the nation resulting into huge losses due to persistent disharmony in the labour sector. This paper examines how management of information could help in achieving industrial harmony to promote economic development in Nigeria. The paper concludes by suggesting some strategies on the utilization of information for the promotion of industrial harmony.

Key words: information Management, Industrial Harmony, Organisational Development

Introduction

Industrial harmony is a concept that is vital to the peaceful coexistence of all actors and stakeholders in any organization. It creates a peaceful working environment that is attractive to tolerance, dialogue and other alternative means of resolving industrial or labour disputes (Akuh, 2016). Industrial harmony is the desired state where all actors are able

to work in a way to maximize organizational profits while achieving individual set goals. Though, industrial conflicts are inevitable in organizations arising from divergent expectations of employees and employers, industrial harmony could be seen as a favourable state to all parties within the industry.

In order to harmonize and unify the differing needs and desires of the various actors in an organization, there may be a need to process and transfer information from one end to another effectively. The way and manner in which information flows from one unit to another, may affect the success or otherwise of the overall goals of the industry. When employees are well informed on the policies carried out by employers, they tend to key into the process of implementing such policies. However, when policies are not properly communicated to employees who are expected to implement them, there could be a lukewarm attitude towards the execution of such policies.

Enyi (2001), cited by Mukoro (2013), explained that most of the problems experienced in Nigeria's educational institutions such as: disharmony, instability and other forms of industrial conflict resulting in low productivity could be attributed to poor communication and ineffective management of information in these institutions. Nworgu (2005) averred that most Nigerian universities have experienced a series of crises caused by poor communication between students and university administrators. In non-educational organizations, Onyeizugbe, Aghara, Olohi and Chidigo (2018), observed that the non-existence of a pure state of industrial harmony, management practice of exclusionism and derogation of organizational communication pattern among food and beverage firms in Anambra state, Nigeria, has led to grievances between employees and management which has eroded the set objectives of these firms.

Grievances, incessant industrial unrest, crisis, chaos and conflicts will negatively affect the productivity and growth of the organization. This situation has become apparent in many organizations in Nigeria. Nigeria as a nation has witnessed many cases of industrial unrests, strikes and various forms of industrial conflicts. Many of these organizational conflicts could be prevented if appropriate steps have been taken by the required parties to achieve peace and harmony which can guarantee organizational productivity. There is therefore a

need to promote a state of industrial harmony through effective information management.

Concept of Industrial Harmony

Industrial harmony refers to a friendly and cooperative agreement on working relationships between employers and employees for mutual benefits (Ladan, 2012). According to Puttapalli and Vuram (2012), industrial harmony is concerned with the relationship between management and employees with respect to the terms and conditions of employment and the work place. In effect, it is a situation where employees and management cooperate willingly in pursuit of an organization's aims and objectives. Industrial harmony requires that:

1. All management personnel understand their responsibilities and what is required of them, and have the training and authority necessary to discharge such duties and responsibilities efficiently;
2. Duties and responsibilities for each group of employees are stated with clarity and simplicity in the organizational structure;
3. Individual employees or work-groups know their objectives and are regularly kept informed of progress made towards achieving them;
4. There is an effective link in the interchange of information and views between senior management and members of the work group;
5. Supervisors are briefed about innovation and changes before they occur so they can explain management's policies and intentions to the work-group;
6. Employers cooperate with trade unions in establishing effective procedures for the negotiation of terms and conditions of employment and for the settlement of disputes;
7. Employers encourage the establishment of effective procedures among member organizations for the settlement of grievances and disputes at the level of the establishment or undertaking;
8. Employers take all reasonable steps to ensure the organization observes agreements and agreed upon procedures; and
9. The organization maintains a communication system which secures the interchange of information and views.

different levels in the organization and ensures that employees are systematically and regularly kept informed, factually and objectively, of changes and progress in the system.

The study by Onyeizugbe et al. (2018), showed that industrial harmony plays a crucial role in determining employee performance in selected Food and Beverage Firms in Anambra State and recommended that management of the focused firms should give room for unions in their organizations to project their views and try as much as possible to align the needs of the employees to that of the organization, as well as creating an atmosphere of feeling of belonging by allowing employees to participate in decision making on matters that relate to them.

Industrial democracy encourages employees to participate in decision making and thus enhances industrial harmony. Industrial democracy is a term generally used to argue that, by analogy with political democracy, workers are entitled to a significant voice in the decisions affecting the organizations in which they work (Fejoh 2015). Workers should be able to send relevant information concerning some of their views on the manner in which the organization is managed. Likewise, managements are expected to process and forward all the relevant information which the employees will need to carry out their day to day activities. A free flow of information from bottom up and vice versa could help the participation of the workers in the running of the organization and decision making, thus promoting industrial democracy and harmony.

Factors Affecting Industrial Harmony in Nigerian organizations

In labour management circles, there are some factors that either affect or influence labour management relations. This section focuses on those substantive areas of labour management relations that often cause conflicts. Adejumo (2011), in tracing the causes of conflict between employers and employees, listed the following factors: wages, job security, workplace health and environment, union relations, government policy, company policy and other economic and non-economic factors such as: ineffective communication, breach of contracts, benefits, allowances and emoluments.

Issues relating to wages and salary administration (with fringe benefits): The relationship between the employer and the employee centers on implicit contract. This is an agreement between unequal parties in which the employee in the light of his or her particular motives, expectations and interests, attempts to make the best deal possible given his or her personal resources such as skill, knowledge, physique, wealth etc. The bargain which is strict involves a certain relationship in part explicit but largely, owing to its indeterminacy implicit between the employee inputs of effort, impairment and surrender of autonomy and employee rewards of cash payment and fringe benefits such as job satisfactions, social rewards, security, power, status, career potentials etc. Fox (1972) points out that the unitary framework offers a variety of ways of questioning the legitimacy of trade union activities suggesting, alternatively that unions are historical carry over that is no longer needed in an age of enlightened management, that they are outcomes of sectional greed or that they are vehicles for subversive political interests. Since unions exist, conflict then is inevitable but management and unions should be left to settle their differences, as far as this is possible, on their own terms (Donovan, 1978).

Unstable bargain between the worker and the employer due to market context: Market context as an environmental factor renders most collective bargain inoperative and unstable. Market 'viability' on the part of the employer creates a constant pressure to minimize cost. This leads to the pressure to either cut the rewards or increase the efforts of the employee. In either way it is to the employees' disadvantage. However, the employees are bound to defend themselves, especially since they buy goods and services in the same market.

Information Management

Information is so crucial to all aspects of our lives that we literally cannot afford to manage it badly. It has also been recognized that sharing and managing information are critical to performing the mission and business of the organization. Individuals and organizations rely on their ability to select and process information. An information system can be defined technically as a set of interrelated...

collect (or retrieve), process, store, and distribute information to support decision making and control in an organization (Sebastian and Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2015). In addition, an information system is a work system whose activities are devoted to processing information, that is, capturing, transmitting, storing, retrieving, manipulating, and displaying information of an organisation (Alter, 2008). This system according to Symons, (1991) usually utilises various platforms like computer hardware and software, manual procedures and models for planning, controlling and decision making as well as creating a database for an organisation. Land, (1985) opines that an information system is a social system, which has embedded in it information technology. The extent to which information technology plays a part is increasing rapidly. But this does not prevent the information system from being a social system, and it is not possible for any organisation to design a robust, effective information system, incorporating significant amounts of the technology without treating it as a social system

It is clear to deduce that in addition to supporting decision making, coordination and control, information systems may also help managers and workers to analyze problems, visualize complex subjects, and create new products. Therefore, any good information system must be such that information is shared and managed in ways that support the mission and vision of the organisation. Every organisation must strive as a commonly understood, accepted, and supported goal, to bring quality information, in the right form, to the right people at the right time to support sound and deliberate decisions and to generate ideas. Information must be seen as a core resource which is critical to the success of the industrial organisations. Communication or transfer of information from the source (sender) to the receiver is an important aspect of information management. Communication is vital to any social system as it creates an environment of trust, harmony and proficiency. It promotes effective management practices and motivates staff to greater productivity (Mukoro, 2013).

Characteristics of a Good Information System

Effective management information system according to Kenneth (2002) cited in Yusuf Sanni and Kazeem, (2014) possesses numerous qualities among which are the following:

Relevance: This type of information characteristics is of the truth. The overriding quality information must be relevant to the problem being considered; though information may take different forms. Examples are: reports, messages, tabulations etc. The positive effect it has on an exigent issue or needs at hand will mainly be the functions of its relevance otherwise. The absence of this quality will make understanding of the message more difficult and may eventually cause frustration to the user.

Accuracy: Information should be sufficiently accurate for it to be relied upon by those in the management team and for the purpose for which it is intended. Even though absolute accuracy may not be obtainable, yet the level of accuracy must be related to the decision level involved. Also, accuracy should not be confused with precision. Information may be inaccurate but precise or vice-versa.

Time: Good information is that which is communicated in time to be used. The timing of information is essentially important in this regard. In fact, information should be produced at a frequency which is related to the type of decision that is actually involved.

Details: Information should contain the least amount of details consistent with effective decision making. The level of details usually varies with the level in the organization

Strategies for Managing Information for the Promotion of Industrial Harmony

In order to achieve industrial harmony at the various organizational levels, the following strategies are suggested to complement the prevailing ones set in motion by the various organisations. Expectedly, these strategies will cover the sender, the medium, the process and the receivers of information in the organization. That is, what information is being sent, how it is sent, who sent it, where it is sent and when it is sent.

Information must flow timely across and within all the stakeholders who will be responsible for planning and implementing the information as contained in the policy document. This shows that everyone in the organization is important and must be well and

adequately briefed about the reasons for the action taken. This act of prompt feedback will no doubt boost the employees' ego and help the management to achieve optimum cooperation in the execution of the tasks. This will promote industrial harmony as the two parties will be working to achieve the objectives deemed to promote their well being and general development of the organization.

Vital information should be kept at the levels where they are applicable. Officers who have been charged with the responsibility of accessing information should only pass it as at the time when they are expected to do so. Untimely flow of information or sending information to wrong quarters or officers can serve as a threat to organizational harmony and lead to conflict and crisis. Top management secrets should not be divulged anyhow as this can spread easily to so many people especially in this era of technological development where social media can spread information to a large number of people within few seconds.

The language, the manner and the ways of passing information or communicating (whether verbal, written or non-verbal means, including gestures) should be such that will promote peace. The use of polite words and attitude in passing information should be preferred to making orders, authoritative and rude statements. This will help to motivate the employees or subordinates who are the key actors in the execution of various organizational policies which will lead to the development of the organization.

The use of social network mediums like WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, Scribl, among others should be encouraged among employees on departmental and organizational level. This will bring members of the organization together. It will also help in managing information within the members of the organization. Relevant information can be transferred and shared among the members of the group easily within little time. This kind of platforms provides rallying points for management and employees to exchange timely ideas, air views without any barrier. Some issues which the subordinates may not be able to discuss face to face can be boldly discussed on such platforms. This also gives the management the opportunity to get feedbacks from the subordinates. It will also afford them the opportunity to address any challenge facing the subordinates promptly. However, the use of these platforms must be handled maturely so that

they do not constitute distractions. Rules must also be set and enforced to ensure that they are mainly used for the purpose of managing information relating to organizational activities only.

Officers who are saddled with the responsibility of keeping and processing information must be trained from time to time on effective management of information in the organization. They should be able to pass information as at when due to the appropriate quarters for the smooth running of the organization.

The challenges facing Management Information Systems in Industrial Organisations

The barriers in the literatures could be divided into humanistic, organizational and environmental factors. However, the major drawbacks to the inculcation of MIS in organisations according to Mehdi and Jafar 2013) are as following:

Humanistic factors:

1. The lack of information of the managers and users as they don't know exactly what they want and what their information needs are;
2. The lack of understanding of the needs of the users by designers (the lack of correct definition of the needs and their analysis);
3. The lack of information of the managers and users about the collaboration method with the designer team;
4. The lack of participation of the managers and users in information system design;
5. The lack of understanding of the managers of software and information systems;
6. The lack of information of most of the analysts and programmers (designers) with new system work environment;
7. The lack of acceptance of the system executers and resistance against the change and
8. The lack of accuracy in the data collected.

Organizational factors

1. The lack of good conditions for participation and collaboration of the managers, users and system directors;
2. The lack of consistency and complexity of the existing manual systems;
3. The lack of existing systems and methods analysis before the information system design;
4. The lack of evaluation of the existing power;
5. Bad condition of educating the specialized forces;
6. The lack of human resources with management and computer fields and other required specializations (the problems of absorbing human resources);
7. Inadequate education of the users;
8. Inadequate and incomplete documentation and
9. Unsuitable implementation of the system.

Environmental factors

1. The lack of quality criterion of the existing information systems in developing nations like Nigeria;
2. The lack of suitable consultants for designing the system and software;
3. The lack of procedures and methodology and stages of creating the system;
4. The lack of evaluation of environmental aspects in management information systems;
5. The lack of suitable use of mass media to develop the culture of using computer and information systems and
6. The lack of serious consideration and adequate investment in this regard.

Prospects of Management Information Science

MIS if properly employed at the organisational level will allow multiple users to access the same content all at the same time without any discrepancies. This potentiality boosts accountability from the organisation since multiple people can access a particular content and verify whether they are consistent or are not. As a matter of fact, most organizations tend to suffer due to poor accountability from those charged with the mandate to manage certain details.

A good number of MIS would play the role of record keeping or institutionalization of data bases that can easily keep confidential or invaluable information. In essence, decision making often calls for the reading of certain past work (Jahangir, 2005). This is where record-keeping comes in handy. On the flipside, databases normally function towards providing future places of information retrieval. Principally, the record keeping and data-basing tool of MIS definitely ensures that decisions are made viably while businesses run smoothly.

Conclusion

Industrial harmony is a state that both management and employees desire in any organization. This is because it provides a working environment which is peaceful. It affords the employees the opportunity to participate in the decision making and thus encourage them to be more committed to their tasks as well as promotion and achievement of organization objectives. This peaceful environment will be greatly influenced by the way and manner information is managed within the organization. It is therefore recommended that organizations make use of the strategies suggested above since it will lead to effective management of information and consequently a harmonious industrial environment. This kind of workplace condition will no doubt enhance the organizational development in Nigeria.

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