

Chapter 9

Conceptualizing Industrial Relations Atmosphere Techniques in Business Environment

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Introduction

Adamson (1989), industrial relations atmosphere, which most often is interchanged as industrial relations climate, is a subset of organizational climate that pertains to the norms and attitudes reflecting union-management relationships in an organization. Arguing in the same line, Payne and Pugh (1976) claim that the concept of industrial relations atmosphere can be interchanged with industrial relations climate because the concept of industrial climate has variables, which supposedly have a reasonable capacity to convey the general psychological atmosphere of an organization, and consequently can influence the satisfaction, motivation and behavior patterns of individuals in the workplace. This view emphasizes the role of industrial relations atmosphere not only as an important concept, but also as an outcome of various policies, rules and structures implemented by organizational decision makers, and which consequently leads to the enhancement of, or deterioration of organizational performance with several positive and negative parameters.

The main focus of industrial relations in organizations is widely considered to be the development of peaceful relations that ensures mutual respect for parties and comprehensive solution to problems affecting the employment conditions of workers, as well as industry efficiency. Such parameters as sound recruitment policies, good union-management relations, effective communication, well articulated grievance procedures can improve labour-management relations which further fosters good or harmonious industrial relations atmosphere (Onasanya, 2005). However, the industrial relations system through which the industrial relations atmosphere can be identified may be highly formal with many levels and forms of rules and regulations to guide interactions, or it may be extremely informal, based on the practices of the organization over the years. Poor or adversarial industrial relations atmosphere can have serious implication for industrial systems and their structures, as organizations and their managers will find it hard to recover the cost that accrues from such depleting industrial relations atmosphere with a state of persistent industrial crises and ineffectiveness, the indicator of which is industrial disharmony, manifesting in rampant labour grievances, trade disputes and especially, incessant worker's strikes.

Concept of Industrial Relations Atmosphere

Blyton and Turnbull have argued that industrial relation apart from having a distinctive characteristics has an independent nature which is continuous and open-ended and such employment relationship can engender both conflict and co-operation. As such Tamunomebi (2019), building on this assertion, noted that there are three basic aspects of industrial relations which every industrial relations system must be occupied with before one can be rightly assured of a peaceful industrial relations atmosphere. These include:

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i) **The Development of Healthy Labour**

This connotes the existence of an organized democratic trade union and an association of employers. Both organizations are capable of enhancing job security and improve other terms and conditions of employment. These organization's also allow for increased workers' participation. This can also enable further negotiations, discussions or even negotiation's. The spirit of collective bargaining is encouraged as the equality of status of the conflicting member's or groups are not taken for granted. This singular act will create the expected atmosphere of trust and goodwill among the parties in the negotiation table. According to Tamunomiebi (2019) collective bargaining when properly practiced plant discipline and union relations which is likely an industrial relations . Welfare work provided by the three actors maintain and improve labour management relations which contributes to the development of industrial peace.

(ii) **Maintenance of Industrial Peace**

Industrial peace at any point in time can be largely achieved through the following means

- a) Setting up a machinery for the prevention and settlement of industrial disputes. Some legislative and administrative enactments can be made such as the trade union acts, industrial dispute acts, standing order act, work committees, joint management councils, conciliation tribunals, courts of enquiry national tribunals, industrial tribunals and provision for voluntary arbitration.
- b) The government as one of the actors should have power to refer disputes to adjudication when the situation tends to get out of hand.
- c) The government enjoyed the power to maintain the status quo
- d) The provision of the bipartite and tripartite forms for the settlement of disputes. These forums act on basis of the code of discipline industry the code of conducts, the code of efficient and welfare, model standard order, grievance procedure and the granting of voluntary recognition.
- e) The creation and maintenance of implementation of cells and evaluation committees.

iii)Development of industry democracy using the following techniques' (a) establishment of shop councils and joint management, (b) recognition of human rights in industry, (c) increase in labour productivity and (d) the availability of proper work environment.

According to Atilola (2011) workers strikes, labour grievance, and trade disputes can be utilized as indicators of the trend in industrial relations. In justifying the need for 112 employees with regards to the oil industry and oil bearing communities, Girigiri (1999) stated that industrial relations is important because they are concerned with a number of issues bordering on the behavior of workers in the organization in which they earn their living; industrial relations also explains patterns of corporations, conflict and conflict resolution among workers and among managers and between groups; it is also concerned with determining those factors which determine the out- put of an organization from production to human satisfactions or dissatisfaction. Industrial relations as an interplay been the major actors in the industry is also necessary because form it an industrial relations atmosphere manifest.

Yesufu (1984) is of the view that industrial relation is concerned with labour problems in all their ramifications ranging from employment problems to job-seemingly conditions of work; remuneration level, frequency methods of wage payment and wage fixing employee development. Industrial relation according to him also deals with the institutions concerned with these labour problems namely, trade unions, employers' organizations, the labour administrative mechanism, such as joint consultation, collective bargaining, labour tribunals as well as courts. All of which fall within the ambit of industrial relation atmosphere. (Girigiri, 1999:119-120) stated that:

"Industrial relations also involves rule-making at the crux of which are issues relating to wages, working conditions, benefits and various other subjects,

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in as much as these are concerned with the rights and obligations of the parties in modern work settings”.

The concept of industrial relations atmosphere relates to the state of the organization's industrial relations practices. It is suggested that a firm's industrial relations activities generate a characteristic atmosphere or climate in the organization. Dastmalchian, Blyton and Adamson (1989) view industrial relations climate as a subset of organizational climate that pertains to the norms and attitudes reflecting union-management relationships in an organization. Dastmalchian, Blyton and Adamson (1989) also referring to Payne and Pugh (1976)'s claim that the concept of industrial relation atmosphere can also be interchanged or replaced with industrial relations climate or organizational climate, because the concept of organizational climate has variables that represents the norms, feelings and attitudes prevailing at the workplace which has the capacity to convey the general psychological atmosphere of an organization, and consequently, can influence the satisfaction, motivation and behavior patterns of individuals in the workplace (Litwin and stringer, 1968; Payne, 1971).

The lack of consistency in the use of the concept of atmosphere over time has been said to be the root cause of the potential breadth of the concept and the reason for applying the concept to diverse aspects of organizational studies on union-management relations, show a number of possible climate dimensions that exist which reflect various aspects relationships at work Hence, Schneder and Reichers (1983) remarked that: "one of the ways to reduce this diffuseness is by focusing on particular aspects of organizational climate. These examples from the available empirical evidences can be usefully employed as" service climate" (Parkington and Buxton, 1980); "safety climate" (Zohar, 1980); Results from early research shows a positive relationship between organizational climate and job satisfaction and individual job performance (Fredlander and Margolies, 1969).

Martin's (1976) model suggested four dimensions thus: i) extent of cooperation, ii) aggression/resistance, iii) apathy or quiescence, and iv) hostility. However, Breth (1980), Dastmalchian *et al* (1982) and Nicholson (1979) study provided such dimensions as support for trade unions, joint participation, trust, fairness, goal identifications and power balance as measures of atmosphere. Dastmalchian, Adamson and Blyton, (1986) further prescribed the following as dimensions that would serve as a useful starting point for metrics within which climate perceptions about industrial relations may be measured and examined. All these models can possibly reflect various aspects of relationship in the organization; however, our take in this work is to examine adversarial industrial relations atmosphere and harmonious industrial relations atmosphere as two basic measures of industrial relations atmosphere.

Venkata Ratnam (2013) argued that traditional indicators or indices such as man-days lost due to strikes and lockout alone are not adequate. According to him, absence can sometimes be a measure of the misery and abject helplessness of the workers. Indicators of organizational health, such as absenteeism, grievances, accident rates, customer satisfaction index, improvement in productivity and quality, cost reduction, meeting of delivery schedule exceeding customer expectations, sales and, or profit per employee, and the like among the several factors that need to be considered. Industrial relation should contribute to the long term well- being of the organization, its employees, consumers and other actors. Venkata Ratnam (2013) opined that indicators of an industrial relation atmosphere can be developed through bench marking best practices in terms of human development and competitiveness. These include education and skills, safety and health, organizational climate, employee satisfaction indices, productivity, service quality, unit-labour costs, industrial harmony, industrial atmosphere of which are issues relating to wages, working conditions, benefits and various other subjects; in as much as these are concerned with the rights and obligations of the parties in modern work settings (Girigiri, 2002) .

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The concept of Organizational climate refers to a variable, or a set of variables, that represents the norms, feelings and attitudes prevailing at a workplace (Payne & Pugh, 1976). It is normally defined as an umbrella-type, or molar concept that has the capacity to convey the general psychological atmosphere of an organization, and consequently can influence the satisfaction, motivation and behaviour patterns of individuals in the workplace (Litwin & Stringer, 1968; Payne, 1971). In addition, research has shown that the concept of climate links individual and organizational levels of analysis (Payne & Mansfield, 1973). In sum, studies have suggested that a stable industrial relations atmosphere which is actually associated with positive characteristics and consequences is preferred. Drawing from the foregoing discourse so far, one would be on right standing to agree that industrial relations atmosphere is an important aspect in the social science literature that cannot be overlooked.

Industrial Dispute is one major indicator of the existence of an industrial relations atmosphere. The term trade dispute has been defined in the Trade Disputes Acts of 1976 as any dispute between employers and the workers or workers and workers, which is connected with the employment or non employment of the terms of employment and physical condition of work of any person. As observed by Iwuji (1986) 'dispute is the essence of industrial relation because the structure features of industries necessarily create satisfactions which turn result in tension among those stratified'. Also, a trade dispute may be seen as a disagreement between trade union and an employer or group of employers that results from the failure of one side to meet the demand of the other for the amelioration or removal of a grievance (Yesufu, 1984:147). In essence, trade disputes are manifestations of an ill-prepared organization, and if this becomes the trend, we stand to suggest then that no legal sanction can be taken against the workers who may decide to choose the aggressive or militia path to express their grievances.

Tamunomieibi (2019) opined that, in legal terms disputes become impossible except when the issues involved are related to employment of any an individual or physical conditions of a person. Also, the dispute must be either between employers and workers or among workers. Labour management relations is therefore one important means that could prevent and / or mitigate the effect of incessant industrial discontent, disputes, grievances ,lock-outs or conflicts in the work place. Also, Tamunomieibi (2019) as cited in Ubeku (1975) defines grievances as real or images complaints by an employee against his employer based on the alleged interpretation, misapplication or non application of the terms and conditions of the employment.

Fashoyin (1992) opined that conflict needs to be seen, not only in such drama manifestation as strikes, but as the total range of behavior and attitude that express opposition and divergent orientation between management and employee. The variety of conflict in organizations are inexhaustive. They may take the form of peaceful bargaining, go slow, absenteeism, overtime ban, rag-wearing, work, boy colt, grievance, work-to-rule, sit-in, indiscipline, labour turnover, sabotage and strike. Absenteeism, labour turnover, poor time keeping, may take palace on individual basis, while others such as work-in, overtime ban and strikes, generally take the form of collective/group action. While in some cases, they can't be substituted.

Anaedobe, Ihunda & Oparanma (2018) as cited in Onyeonoru (2005) view industrial conflict, as all appearances of displeasure inside the service association, particularly those that are relevant to the pay agreement and endeavor good deal such as lockout; any incompatibility of interest between employee and employer or between employer and employees connected with employment or non-employment. Industrial conflicts usually start in the form of grievance in which case an employees' right is considered to have been mishandled (Johnnie, 2000). There are however some Potential for Conflict even though the conventional view of conflict holds that all conflicts are harmful and must be avoided (Johnnie and Nwasike, 2002). It is agreed that conflict is not only a positive force in a group but that it is absolutely necessary for a group to perform effectively. Put further, conflict is constructive when it improves the quality of decisions, stimulates creativity and innovation,

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encourages interest and curiosity among members, provides medium through which problems can be aired and tensions released and fosters development of self-evaluation and change. Conflict therefore challenges the status-quo and therefore furthers the creation of innovation. Conflict can also be functional when it forces group members to evaluate alternatives carefully (Johnnie and Nwasike,2002).

Labour disputes can be divided into two sub-categories, viz: individual disputes and collective disputes. Both types of disputes are related to workers. Grievance of management or employers against workers may arise in very few cases. However, the following discussion is solely on workers' grievances. This include: i) individual dispute which arises as a result of one employee feeling aggrieved, and ii) collective disputes that concern both the group and the various workers' union. For convenience, Tamunomiebi (2019) suggested some causes of workers' trade dispute which are grouped into the following categories :i) wages and related issues, ii) conditions of service, iii) discipline iv) interpretation or violation of agreement v) non- recognition of unions and anti- union activities.

Industrial actions are sanctions or weapons used by workers' union. They are another major indicator of the existence of an industrial relations atmosphere. The use of strikes is permitted by the Trade Dispute Emergency Provision Decree, (1968). Trade Dispute Emergency Provision Decree, 1968 defines strikes as the cessation of work (Flippo 1982:398). Alugbuo (2000: 142) noted that it is the best known form of industrial action and can be described as a deliberate concerted withdrawal of labour. Alugbuo (2000) argue that if this is so then, there can be no true collective bargaining, if there is no possibility of a strike. In Nigeria, the possibility of a strike will be imminent following the application of the mandatory notice to the employer by the union. Forms of strike include: i) jurisdictional strike (Trade dispute act of 1976); ii) wild-cat strike; iii) sit down strike; iv) picketing (Flippo, 1982:399). other forms of strike are: i) go slows, ii) a work to rule and iii) hunger strikes. Going away from this, we shall proceed as we consider some measures of industrial relations atmosphere.

Summary

Organizational managers should first understand that the responsibility to identify areas of deviation and to maintain discipline lies in their power as managers. must now ask themselves how they can deliberately achieve this and why they should achieve this goal of discipline maintenance. They are also to ensure that workers are informed through shared understanding, regular reminders, counseling consenting to fine payments in case of any intention to deviate from laid down rules and standards of the organization.the answer is well known and accepted by all organizational members.

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