Labour Strike and Grievance Management in Electricity Distribution Companies in Lagos State Nigeria

FATUNMBI, Oladotun Muideen
Administrative Staff College of Nigeria, Topo-Badagry, Lagos, Nigeria

Abstract: The study examines the relationship between labour strike and grievance management in Electricity Distribution Companies in Lagos State, Nigeria. The descriptive research design was used to study 761 employees of EKO Electricity Distribution Company Limited, Ikeja, Lagos State, Nigeria. The stratified sampling method was used to select a sample of 120 across the various categories of workers. Questionnaire was the main instrument for data collection measured on a 6-point Likert Scale from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. Data were analysed using the Pearson’s Correlation statistical technique with the aid of SPSS software. The findings of the study reveals that labour strike has significant moderate positive relationship with grievance management in the organisation (r = 0.469; p<0.01) and therefore recommends that the management of EKO Electricity Distribution Company Limited should encourage better employee - management relationship through meetings seeking union opinions on personnel issues and discourage autocratic leadership thereby promoting better and improved corporate grievance management.

Keywords: Labour Strike, Trade Disputes, Grievance Management.

Introduction

The unpalatable side of individual relations, and on which the public often associate unions, is the strike. The strike indicates a breakdown of cordial relationship between the labour and management and is usually the one aspect of industrial relations that invites the most negative commentary. When a union calls out its members on strike, it is in the belief that strike will exert pressure on the employer and sometimes indirectly on government to take a desired action, such as conceding a demand for improvement in terms of employment, or ameliorating an unsatisfactory working condition. Most strikes involve attempts by either the union or management to change the bargaining position of the other party. When properly used, a strike can force management to concede to the demand of the union. It can impose exorbitant costs and thereby induce them to reach agreement. Apart from the use of the strike by the workers to win substantive demands, a strike may be used to effect a change in the structure of bargaining, such as changing from enterprise bargaining to multi-employer bargaining, or vice versa. Davies and Akinrodye (2016) confirmed that generally strike is the mass refusal of employees to work due to their dissatisfaction either caused by disgruntled feelings just to mention a few: victimization, discrimination, violation of legislation or rule and poor application of provisions of collective bargaining.

The argument against the right to strike in the public sector in Nigeria rests more on the impact of the strike on the economy, public health and safety than on the sovereignty doctrine. If however, the right to strike is denied, then there ought to be effective and mutually satisfactory method of regulating employment condition in the public sector.

Many times, the reason workers go on strike has something to do with wages and benefits and their option of going or the strike to shows their disagreement with their employer’s stance. Sometimes, it works and sometimes it doesn’t. Labour unions have historically played a huge role in strikes and continue to do so. Strike occurs most bargaining. This is a time when there is a contract negotiation going on between the union and the employer and the union, are trying to agree on a contract. A strike is usually a last resort by a union to attempt to get employer to agree to the contract.

1.1 Statement of the problem

The National Union of Electricity Employees (NUEE) South-East Zone has threatened to direct workers of the Enugu Electricity Distribution Company (EEDC) to embark on industrial action if the alleged “dehumanizing and slave treatment” being meted out to the workers by the management was not stopped forthwith. The union said no fewer than fifteen senior managers and storekeepers in...
Onitsha business unit of the EEDC had been arrested and now cooling their heels at Onitsha Police Area Command over allegation of “sharp practices in electricity billing and metering in Anambra state”. This action caused huge revenue lose to the company which motivated the management to look for ways and strategies to forestall or reduce future occurrence.

Consequently, the study seeks to examine labour strike and its effect on grievance management procedures in Eko Electricity Distribution Company Limited (EKO DISCO) in Ikeja, Lagos state, Nigeria to enhance industrial harmony by the management.

1.2 Objective of the study

The main objective of the study is to examine the effect of labour strike on grievance management in electricity distribution companies of Lagos State, Nigeria.

1.3 Research Questions

How does labour strike affect grievance management in EKO Electricity Distribution Company Limited in Ikeja, Lagos State?

1.4 Research Hypothesis

Ho: Labour Strike does not significantly affect grievance management in EKO Electricity Distribution Company Limited in Ikeja, Lagos State?

1.6 Significance of the Study

The study assists the management of EKO Electricity Distribution Limited to design an effective negotiation strategy hence formulate effective personnel policies for the organisation to enhance industrial harmony.

2.0 Literature Review

According to Industrial Disputes Act 1947, a strike is “a cessation of work by a body of persons by a body of persons employed in industry acting in combinations or a concerted refusal of any number of person who are or have been so employed to continue to work or to accept employment; or a refusal under a common understanding of any number of such persons to continue to work or to accept employment. Secondly, it also includes the refusal of a number of employers to continue work under their employer.

In a strike, the trade union ensures that all workers agree to stop working in order to protest against something they think is unfair where they work. Labours withhold their services in order to pressurize their employment or government to meet their demands. Demands made by strikes can range from asking for higher wages or workplace environment. Strike sometimes occurs so that employers listen more carefully to the workers and address their problem.

Kilman (1976) define the relationship between unions and management as central issue for the survival of the organization in order to achieve the purpose for which it was established.

Strike represents the exercise of his fundamental right to withdraw his services. Situations which appear to contradict his personal wish and aspiration or which threatens the fulfillment of the needs of the individual are being registered in the process of striking. More importantly it is these individual rights that are harnessed by the trade union to embark on strike action. The strike is very potent tool and can be very powerful if the workers on strike represent irreplaceable labour, or if the production loss incurred by the employer during the strike is very significant.

The most explicit impact of strike on the employer is the loss of productivity. Related to productivity is the loss of output. This is because caesura of productivity culminates to loss output. loss of output automatically leads to inability to meet customer’s demand and inability to supply customers’ orders on schedule. The end product of the above impacts is the loss of profit of the concerned industry. Organizations exist for profit and when organizations start running at a loss that is an indication of danger. The long-term cost of the strike to the employer is the loss of employees who many probably not return after the strike. Strike therefore tends to repute good relationship between managers and trade union leaders because it could lead vengeful action against union leaders.

Most strikes involve attempts by either the union or management to change the bargaining positions of the other party or it may be used to effect a change in the structure of bargaining, such as changing from enterprise bargaining, to multi-employer bargaining or vice-versa. (Fashoyin, 1992) based on his finding that the workers decisions to take part in a strike would be balanced between the eventual gain (and loss) accruing to him on the one hand, and the consequence of his action on the community on the other.

Strike defined by section 37 (1) of Trade Dispute Act No: 7 1976 is a cessation of work by a body of employed purpose acting in combination or a
concern refusal under a common understanding of any number of employed purpose to continue to work for an employer in consequence of a dispute, done as a means of compelling of purpose employed to aid other workers. Strike typically takes in response to employee grievance.

The unitary approach recognizes every work organization as an integrated and harmonious whole that exists for a common purpose. It emphasizes the co-dependency of employees and employers each worker identifies with the objectives and mission of the organization. The classical perspective of management emerged from the industrial revolution and focuses on the efficiency, productivity, and output of employees as well as of the organisation as a whole. It generally does not focus on human or behavioural attributes or variation among employees.

A more recent view of conflict is the integrationist perspective, which encourages a minimum level of conflict within the group in order to encourage self-prevent apathy or too great a tolerance for harmony and status quo. The interactionist perspective places great emphasis on influential power of direct human interaction, rather than on the influence of large social institutions or historical developments. Interaction includes verbal communication and mannerisms. Interactions ultimately affect the way people understand themselves, others and the world around them.

The pluralistic manager is more likely to accept that conflict in organization requires careful handling and attempts to reconcile rival interest. The pluralist theory believes that the workplace is composed of diverse sets of beliefs, values, attitudes, and behaviours (Giles 1989); there are opposing sources of leadership and attachment in organisations (Farnham 1993); conflicts are inevitable because there are inherent competing interests (Dabscheck 1989 and Dzimbiri 2008); the role of the management is to mediate among competing interests (Farnham 1993); Trade Unions are legitimate representatives of employees, and they are viewed positively because they help employees emphasise their decision-making power (Leat 2001); the state promotes public interest (Kaufman 2008) and industrial harmony and stability can be attained through a series of concessions and negotiations between managers and employers through the collective bargaining process (Bacon and Storey, 2000 and Kaufman, 2008).

4.0 Results and Analysis

Table 1: Relationship between Labour Strike Action and Grievance Management

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<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
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<td>LSA Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
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** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

KEY: LSA = Labour Strike Action; GM=Grievance Management;

The table reveals that there is significant moderate positive relationship between labour strike action and employee grievance management in the organization (r = 0.469**; p < 0.01). Therefore, it can be concluded that there is a significant moderate positive relationship between labour strike action and grievance management in EKO Electricity Distribution Company Limited.

5.0 Conclusion

The study empirically reveals that there is significant moderate positive relationship between labour strike action and grievance management in business organizations. The findings support the
position of Drucker (1959) where he posits that any business enterprise must build a true team and weld individual efforts into a common effort. The manager must know and understand his performance and what his supervisor must know, what contributions to demand and expect and must judge him accordingly, otherwise there will be friction and frustrations among employees with the attendant negative effects on performance.

The study therefore recommends that the management of EKO Electricity Distribution Company Limited should encourage better employee - management relationship through meetings seeking union opinions on personnel issues mainly to discourage autocratic leadership thereby promoting better and improved corporate grievance management.

References