International Journal for Social Studies
Available at https://edupediapublications.org/journals

ISSN: 2455-3220
Volume 02 Issue 03
March 2016

Managing Industrial Relations through Public Relations and Collective Bargaining

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Abstract

Public relations are, perhaps, the most invisible aspect of business communication known to man. The reason is because, though it is called public relations, its activities are hardly public. The only time it is seen in action is when there is disaster or crisis. This is because success is taken for granted and is hardly acknowledged. This paper uses the observation-participation (public relations) and collective bargaining as crisis prevention methods to appraise how industrial harmony can be achieved. It also employs the theory of corporate social responsibility (CSR) as the thread that joins managerial and employee relations together to foster organizational harmony. The main objective is to highlight how public relations and collective bargaining can be employed to achieve industrial peace and ensure employer-employee satisfaction without which organizational or corporate growth is impossible. The findings reveal that where management fails to create conducive atmosphere for employee growth by denying the workers avenues to fully express themselves in matters concerning them, the organization suffers. Again, where employees fail to utilize the communication outlets open to them, all the stakeholders pay the price through industrial disharmony or crisis. Industrial peace is a product of management-worker cooperation and not a one sided affair. The implications of this study are reflected in the fact that neither management nor the employees want their company to fail, thus, both parties lose whenever there is crisis hence all must work to ensure smooth flow of communication. Again, a crisis situation affects not only the organization but also all its stakeholders which includes the society and the government.

Keywords: Collective Bargaining, Public Relations, Industrial Harmony, Government, Organization**.**

1.1 Introduction

Human psychologists, among who is Abraham Maslow, propose that motivational acquisition is essentially a matter of need gratification. These needs according to Ekeruo, Ekwe, Nwamuo and Ikediashi, (1988) with their corresponding goals are not learned but are innate components of human nature. There are five innate needs which are physiological needs, needs for physical safety and security, needs for love, affection and belonging, needs for self and

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social esteem and self-actualization (p.112). Of all these needs, the one which encompasses all the others is the last, which is self-actualization. In the Nigerian parlance, self-actualization entails having "arrived" which means to be sufficiently well-off, almost to the point of extravagance. But extravagance is far from the focus here.

The focus rather is to address the issues raised in the opening quotation of this discourse, to boot: how may the labourer earn a just living to be able to carter for himself and take care of his family and other responsibilities without dovetailing into conflict with his employer? The worker or labourer is mainly concerned with his earned wages while management is often preoccupied with making profit. Shakespeare (1958) offers some insight of the worker's concern:

Sir, I am a true labourer: I earn that I eat, get that I wear; owe no man hate, envy no man's happiness; glad of other men's good, content with my harm; and the greatest of my pride is, to see my ewes graze and my lambs suck. (Act II: Sc. II 220).

Shakespeare in the above quotation is simply stating the obvious to the point that every man would want to get satisfaction from the fruits of his labour.

The world of labour is necessarily divided into two: the employer and the employee, otherwise management and workers. Over time, labour transits into management but management does not transit into labour except rarely.

However, these two entities also inevitably represent two opposing worldviews. Realistically, there ought not to be opposition but the nature of man and the conditions of existence make it so. This is because the relationship between the employer and the employee can best be described in figurative terms as a necessary evil. The reason is simply that management would rather make use of the worker gratis if it is possible for it to do so. In trying to do this, management should not be blamed, rather there is need to understand it. On the other hand, the worker by nature believes that management does not fully appreciate his potentials, thus conflicts are inevitable. The ongoing tussle between the Trade Union Congress, (TUC), The Nigerian Labour Congress and the Legislators over the inclusion of Minimum Wage in the Constitution, is a case in point. (NLC)When conflicts arise, there is need to broker peace and find solution hence the need for mediation. Mediation in this regard cannot work on the basis of the individual. The reason is that when one finger brings oil, it soils the rest. In other words, punishments tend to be transferred unlike progress. Again, it is a matter of coeval situation. That is, when a worker is laid off, for whatever reason, others in the same situation enter into a panic. To counter this situation, there arises the need for unionism. The case of the single broom and the bunch is germane here. As a single broomstick, even a child can break it; but as a bunch, the broom becomes a force to be reckoned with because it can no

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longer be broken, as the Igbo say in a proverb.

1.2 Theoretical framework

This study is anchored on corporate social responsibility, (CSR), whose main tenets revolve on the need for organizations to be responsive to the concerns and issues which affect the environment of their operation. "A major test of managerial success is the degree to which a company is compatible with its environment. Since the environment houses, as it were, the economic, social, political, and technological threats and opportunities available to a firm, the success of the enterprise is closely linked to its ability to anticipate change and to position itself to be responsive to new environmental forces," (Sturdivant,1985 p.2). The welfare the workforce of an organization and the community of its operation is a vital aspect of the social responsibility of a company. The roads the workers ply, the markets from which they buy and sell, the source of their water supply, as well as the laws which govern such community all have direct bearing on the success of an organization and as such must not be trifled with. Victoria Ajala, observes that employee services, training, counseling and granting allowances to workers are necessary part of corporate social responsibility (as cited in Nwanne, 2015p.88) Notwithstanding that CSR has several sides to it, the most important part of it is the recognition of the fact that both the organization and its workforce constitute internal and external publics of the community and that the community is also a vital part of the organization. The relationship is not only symbiotic, it is a necessary evil. None can do without the other and have a success story to tell.

Thus, management, workforce and community must be socially responsible by keeping the unwritten laws of harmonious existence as much as those spelt out by the law. The implication here is that management must appreciate the rules and regulations including environmental guidelines of the community where the company is sited; the workers on their part are part of the community and the community must respect the concerns of the company. For instance, Ecobank (Plc), and other corporate bodies operating within Delta State University abide by the rules and regulations as are spelt out by the institution. This theory is, therefore, quite appropriate as it cements the relationship between management and labour as well as with the community.

Having clearly stated the theoretical framework for the study, we will now take a brief look at public relations before we delve into unionism and the concept of the struggle.

1.3 Public Relations: What Is It?

The term "public relations" has been variously defined. Anyanwu (2009, p. 286) sees public relations as "the art and social science of generating interest in oneself, in someone else, in a thing or place." On the other hand, for Campbell, Martin and Fabos (2009), "because it involves multiple forms

of communication, public relations (emphasis included), is difficult to define precisely. It covers a wide array of actions, such as shaping the image of a politician or celebrity, repairing the image of a major corporation, establishing two-way communication between consumers and companies and molding war-time propaganda" (p.431) After outlining the subject in such broad terms, they then went on to attempt a definition as follows. In their words: "broadly defined public relations, refers to the entire range of efforts by an individual, an agency, or any organization attempting to reach or persuade audience." Ajala (2001) quotes Harlow in one of the longest definitions of public relations as:

Public relations is the distinctive management function which helps to establish and maintain mutual lines of communication, acceptance and cooperation between an organization and its publics; involve the management of problems or issues; helps management to keep informed on and responsive to public opinion; defines and emphasizes the responsibility of management to serve the public interest; helps management to keep abreast of and effectively utilize change, serving as an early warning system to anticipate trends; and uses research and sound ethical communication techniques as its principal tools.(p. 14)

The central concern and purpose of public relations then is how to achieve mutual co-existence between and among those involved in it. Several methods and techniques can be employed to achieve this mutual relationship, none of which needs necessarily be public. Indeed, it could be likened to the relationship between man and woman which other people may be ignorant of its true nature until it manifests in pregnancy. Summarily, public relations aims at "following peace with all men and holiness without which no man shall see the Lord," (Romans 16:16). One sure method of achieving this is through the concept of collective bargaining.

1.3.1 Unions and the Concept of Struggle

According to Carnegie (1989), in "The Gospel of Wealth" cited in Anyanwu (2004) "the problems of our age is the proper administration of wealth, that the ties of brother-hood may still bind together the rich and the poor in harmonious relationship" (p.12),. It is in the nature of man that the haves want to have more while the have-nots struggle to measure up through demands for better conditions of service, remuneration, rapid elevation and general welfare. Thus, the idea of Nigerian unionism, that is trade unionism is traceable to Britain as a consequence of colonalization and to man's desire to make ends meet. As earlier noted, it is a battle between management and workers, ironically which is geared towards better productivity and growth of the organization.

Ironically, the worker is at his best when he works under secure and improved atmosphere, a situation which management appears seemingly ignorant of. Yet, it is when the worker is psychologically and

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physically well provided for that he works harder to better enrich his employer and himself in the process! It is interestingly, "the mode of production of material life that conditions the social, political and intellectual life process in general. As Karl Marx (1978) would say:

in the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, relations of production which correspond to a definite stage of development of their material production forces (p. 41).

Centrally, it is the work force of the society, which builds governments, develops nations, creates civilizations and superstructures and generally makes the society what it turns out to be. If this be the case, where then lies the problem? The problem arises when this work force whose sweat and grime make organizations asks to be allowed to work in an atmosphere that is relaxed , conducive, friendly and that the efforts of their daily lives need to be reflected in their life-styles. When such happens, management, who is the chief beneficiary of improved production and turn-over, ironically refuses. And then rather than appreciate the efforts of the workers, unleashes on them all manners of bureaucratic bottleneck, including laying-off and suspension, among other things. To avoid this, employees come together under one umbrella called Trade Union because there is strength in unity.

Trade Unions Act defines a trade union as:
any combination of workers or employers whether temporary or permanent, the purpose of which is to regulate the terms and conditions of employment, whether the combination in question would or would not, apart from this Act (i.e. if this Act had not been enacted) be an unlawful combination by reason of any of its purposes being in restraint of trade, and whether its purposes do or do not include the provision of benefits for its member. (Idubor, 2005, p.134).

The idea behind the formation of trade unions as noted earlier is as a consequence of a coeval response because where one person falls a victim, the fear of being victimized becomes contagious. It is in the bid to stave off and guide against this event that unionism began since no organization can afford to lay-off all its workers at one fell swoop. It is a matter of common sense because as a stick a broom can do nothing but as a bunch, it can weather the storm. Because membership is voluntary (nobody can be forced to be a member), management can erode the workforce and use the supposedly non-members to work against the union.. However, membership in reality is optionally compulsory. This is because it negates the conscience of good men to eat out of other people's troubles. Trade Unions (Amendment) Act (2005, p.1) stipulates that, "(4) Notwithstanding anything to the contrary in this Act, membership of a trade

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union by employees shall be voluntary and no employee shall be forced to join any trade union or be victimized for refusing to join or remain a member.“ This issue of voluntary membership or non-membership is of interest. Its good side can be likened to the saying that when the going is good and smooth, many people would be your friend. You may even be envied as a result of the seeming benefits you receive from management, until you fall foul of it in whatever manner and method. Then the words of Jefferson that success has a thousand fathers, but defeat is an orphan, would take on its full weight and meaning.

It has been said that it is far easier for an individual to fail in a battle with an organization for the single reason that he is liable to fail. But the reverse is the case in a group. So, what do unions do and what do its members benefit?

1.3.2 The Concept of Collective Bargaining

“The issue of collective bargaining has become quite topical in modern industrial management. This is more so especially as there seems to be lack of understanding of the principles of management by workers on the one hand, and the thinking of the labour force by management on the other”, (Ibagere, 2006, p.1). This lack of understanding arises because employers want maximum output at minimum cost from the labour force while the labour force wants to be motivated which necessarily involves a higher cost from management. With this scenario, there is bound to be conflict. So, what is the way out and where does the Trade Union come in?

One way to avoid disputes of this type or resolve it is through the process of collective bargaining which if properly handled would bring about better understanding of each other and also industrial peace and harmony. There are other ways to resolve disputes in industries but that is a matter for another discourse. So, what is collective bargaining?

The term collective bargaining has been variously defined. But we will restrict ourselves to two or three definitions which will serve our purpose. To that end, H.W. Davey , defines it as:

A continuing institutional relationship between an employer entity (government or private) and labour organizations (union or association) representing exclusively, a defined group or employee of said employer (appropriate bargaining, unit). Concerned with the negotiations administration, interpretation and enforcement of written agreements covering joint understandings as to wages or salaries, rates of pay, hours of work and other conditions of employment (as cited in Ibagere (2006, p.13).

The above quotation assumes that an agreement has been reached, through the avenue of collective bargaining. It also observes that the agreement or the issues raised in it need to be interpreted and enforced. It must be noted that one essential feature of collective bargaining is

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documentation. Unlike gentleman agreement, any understanding arrived at through collective bargaining must be documented. The reason for this is quite obvious. Either party can deny the items agreed upon; they can also genuinely forget or simply refuse to remember. Again, collective bargaining has been defined in the Article 2 of Convention 154 of the International labour Organization (ILO), 1981, in the following words:

The term "collective bargaining" extends to all negotiations which take place between an employer, a group of employees or one or more employer's organization on the one hand and one or more workers organisations on the other for:

(a) Determining working conditions and terms of employment and/or
(b) Regulating relations between employers and workers and/or
(c) Regulating relations between employers or their organizations and a workers' organization or workers organisations (Ibagere, 2006, p.15).

This quotation encapsulates all aspects of collective bargaining. However, in the Section 91 of the Labour Act 2004, we get its nearest approximation in definition by a Nigerian statute. Here, it is seen as "the process of arriving or attempting to arrive at a collective agreement." The definition is quite silent as to what type of collective agreement. Be that as it may, our last definition of the subject is still taken from the same source who cites Taylor and Whitney, whose definition was made clear by the *Black's Law Dictionary* (7th edition) as:

Collective bargaining means the joint determination by employees and employers of the problems of the employment relationship. Such problems include wage rates and wage systems, hours and overtime, vacation, discipline, workloads, classification of employees, layoffs and worker retirements (cited in Ibagere, 2006, p.15).

All the definitions used so far clearly underscore the issue of the collective bargaining process. They also clearly illustrate the role of trade unions in the collective bargaining process. This role is best captured by James, Ode and Soola (1990), who posit that:

Members of trade unions take up matters concerning the working conditions and welfare of employees with the management, after consulting with workers. When agreement is reached on the issue being discussed, they report these directly to the workers… (31)).

The last quotation on the role of trade unions in the process of collective bargaining also indicates that the whole process is undertaken on representational basis on behalf of the workforce. These

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representatives, although they have been empowered by the workforce to make decisions, nevertheless report back the consequence of the collective bargaining to those who sent them. More often than not, the representatives are messengers, whoi. when the issues are not so palatable, fall back on the workforce for support, encouragement and empowerment. If this isii. not done and they act arbitrarily, they areiii. liable to be labeled betrayers and enemies of the cause of workers and run the risk ofiv. losing the workers loyalty. Moreover, thesev. representatives are more often than not, thevi. executive members of the Union or Association. A case in point here is thevii. Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU). Now, ASUU executives or representatives if you prefer, work at the behest and mandate of the general congress. Thus, the executive of ASUU cannot, for instance, call the workers out on a strike ora. call off a strike without recourse to the congress. This is why it makes use of referendum in order to act so that every member has a responsibility for the actionb. taken or not taken. Now, excluding strike actions which invariably are off-shoots of obviously failed attempts at dialogue and negotiations, all the techniques and methods employed to ensure smooth resolution to any issue need not necessarily be made public. And this is where good public relations come in.

1.3.3 The Objectives of Collective Bargaining

When the kernels of the definitions above are pooled together, it is easy to see that the purpose of collective bargaining is to reach agreement on issues bordering on:

Wages and wages rates including overtime, piece rates, shift work, increments and promotions.
Grading and classification of jobs.
Hours of work, annual leave, sick leave, maternity leave, etc.
Allowances – leave, rent, transport.
Uniforms, tools, overalls.
Safety and health equipment and protective gadgets.
Security provisions such as pension, gratuity, redundancy, etc.

Ibagere, (2006, p.17) further says that the agreement may include the following two issues:
Immunity from any punitive action of any worker who partakes in any action either in contemplation or furtherance of trade dispute.
Commitment to the continued process of collective bargaining.

Collective bargaining as a means to resolving industrial disputes is generally favoured by governments and organizations. Even the International Labour Organization (ILO) encourages it. The question then may be asked, if collective bargaining is so effective, why does it need to be used to settle disputes rather than preventing such disputes or nipping them in the bud? The answer to the above question is at once simple and complex. Simple because it can

be answered in one sentence: because the parties involved refuse to see the warning signs when they light up! It is complex because the causes of dispute can range from the observable signals to unforeseen situations. Above all, as noted earlier, management and labour are hardly in cordial relationship to the point of checking each other's pulse. They can be likened to twin kernels in a pod which occupy the same shell but have a wall of different goals between them.

Strange as it may sound, collective bargaining also generates industrial disputes. This arises when management refuses to honour the terms of agreement arising from it. More often than not, labour management somehow feels lazy to recognize and appreciate the position and demand of workers even as the reverse is also the case. If both parties enjoy good relationship through effective and meaningful flow of communication, usually achieved via good and effective public relations, industrial actions will reduce if not totally eradicated. We maintain that excepting sudden occurrences like accidents which can cause disharmony in organizations, no strike action occurs devoid of signals. Indeed, most of them are caused by inadequate communication, poor communication or no communication at all. There is the tendency of management to forget that it is a system. What affects the top, rubs off on the base. So, there is always need to listen to the other side. This listening is the forte of public relations. Through effective and efficient public relations both management and workers are kept abreast of developments in the organization and this helps to checkmate any likely grey areas before they become issues of concern. Not surprisingly, solutions can come from there.

Needless to state, this is where PR comes in: at a point where there appears to be a stalemate. Note that PR has always been there from the outset, though it may not have been specified as such. The reason is that, successful public relations, is always taken for granted. It is the 'right' of the worker to get a raise as at when due, get leave bonus, promotion, receive arrears of payment, etc. or so it seems. These rights are never given automatically by some organizations. They require all the strategic paraphernalia of public relations to be actualized. But, the problem with PR is that it is more noticeable at the point of failure than that of success which underlies the ungrateful nature of man.

1.3.4 Benefits of Collective Bargaining

The first and obvious benefit arising from collective bargaining process is the non-disruption of activities. While negotiations are in progress, work continues and there is normalcy. Here, progress is made without unnecessary tension or flaring of tempers.

Secondly, it enhances the relationship between labour and capital on the one hand and labour and its membership on the other. There is mutual trust, confidence, camaraderie and an atmosphere devoid of rancour.

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Thirdly, the benefits arising there from cut across the work force each according to his office and position. Again, the illustration of the single broom and the bunch comes up again. This is so because it is not easy to ignore a group of people carefully selected and chosen to represent the interest of a body of workers who hold the society together through their sweat and grime.

Also, when disputes are settled amicably, each party involved tends to re-appraise its opponent and there is respect even if it is accorded grudgingly. Each party now knows the worth and value of the other. But this does not have to be the case. Management does not have to wait for the losses that may accrue to it as a consequence of industrial action from the workers before it begins to appreciate their worth. But, this is sadly the case in most situations especially in developing countries. They forget the part of the definition of public relations as serving as an early warning, even a watch dog to all parties.

Furthermore, collective bargaining does not leave any casualties in its wake. In fact, few people are aware of its existence until they see the proceeds in their pay-slips. It is usually smooth like a good and effective public relations tool which it is; its effect is more felt than seen.

Finally, it is documented and cannot therefore be denied. It can be ignored though, for a while like those agreements between the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) and the federal government. However, as the saying goes, a debt may get mouldy, but it never decays. When the moment comes, it can be referred to again. The beauty of the written agreement is that it serves as a reference point and bears the signatures of all the signatories to it.

1.3.5 Role of Public Relation in Collective Bargaining

At this point, it becomes necessary to look at public relations and the role it plays in the collective bargaining process. Leaving out public relations up till this point is deliberate and you will soon see why. We have already seen the definitions and meaning of public relations. Still, Public relations according to experts, is a deliberate and sustained effort designed to create mutual and beneficial relationship between an individual, group and an organization so that all concerned may attain a certain level of satisfaction. Specifically, however, public relations, "is deliberate, planned and sustained effort, to establish and improve the degree of mutual understanding between an organization with the primary objective of assisting that organization or individual to deserve, acquire and retain a good reputation."

Part of that good reputation is a product of satisfied workforce, effective service delivery, customer satisfaction, community responsiveness, inter alia. Before any organization records any meaningful sustainable development, it usually holds series of Board Meetings with management and stake holders in order to plan strategies for progress. On these

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meetings hinge the way forward, including how to create conducive atmosphere for working. In these meetings, also issues of significance, whether positive or negative which are likely to impact on the organization are tabled, discussed and likely solutions arrived at.

This, also, is a product of collective bargaining. It is human beings, experts in the various areas who discuss them. The major instrument here is communication and public relations provides the methods and manners which ensure the choice of diction that will keep the discussion / bargaining at a level where smooth flow is realized. This is because:

Public relations is concerned with improving the relationship between

an organization and groups of people who are important to it. That

relationship may be improved by all sorts of actions taken by the

organization concerned- and not one of them need necessarily ever

be made known to a third party let alone the public at large.

(Crisford as cited in Anyanwu,2009, p.293).

It is likened to a relationship between husband and wife or man and woman. The nature of some of these relationships is somewhat uncertain as to whether they are mutual or otherwise, until there is evidence by way of pregnancy. Thus, pregnancy is usually a measure of the nature of a relationship between a man and a woman. Now, if the pregnancy is denied by the man supposedly responsible, the relationship sours and negative publicity follows it. But, if it is accepted, some people may not be aware of the pregnancy, perhaps until birth, if at all.

This is exactly the case with public relations and trade unions in the process of collective bargaining. What we are saying here is that in both cases, a new pay/wage increase, improved conditions of service, conducive working environment, smooth and quick approval of leave and leave bonus; attractive incentives, good safety measures, etc. which are evidence of successful public relations are taken for granted. Our people are so stingy with commendation! But, if the reverse were to be the case, then questions would be raised about the practitioner's relevance in the organization. Even those who never knew of the existence of a public relations unit there or the function of unions will begin to ask why? How could they let it happen?

The idea is that success is not always guaranteed and that when it is achieved, the tendency is to take it for granted and the efforts made in its realization are usually glossed over. But because failure is a noisy and loud servant its presence is usually noticed than success which is cool, smooth and silent. It is like peace. People never notice its beauty until there is crisis and war! Ironically, their presence is a product of healthy and good public relations efforts!

1.4 Conclusion

The issue of collective bargaining, a strong unifying force between government

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and the people, between labour and capital, cannot be exhausted in this single effort. There are of course the legal aspects which the National Industrial Court Act 2006 takes care of. This court in the part I of its constitution states:

(3) The court shall -

(a) Be a superior court of records; and

(b) Except as may be otherwise provided by an enactment or law, have all the powers of a high court. (National Industrial Court Act, 2006, p.3).

The court holds and presides on all labour or industrial related matters. It covers such areas as collective agreement, strikes and the consequences there from. Interestingly, strike action given the way it is treated, can be said to be illegal in the constitution. There are so many causes of illegality, arising from what they refer to as essential services that the best course open to labour is collective bargaining achieved via good public relations.

We must re-emphasize here that trade unions are as much for peace and desirous of conducive working atmosphere as management or government. However, when there is communication-breakdown arising from whatever source and which threatens the welfare of the worker, the trade union steps in to counter it.

Generally, both management and labour try as much as possible to follow due process in all matters relating to each other. It is only when attempts at due process, which, by the way, follows a prescribed form along regulated and familiar lines, fails that disputes arise.

Trade unions play mediatory roles between management and labour for the mutual benefit of all. The idea is to prevent grief to both employee and the employer. This mediatory role is usually achieved through collective bargaining and via the use of public relations. The labourer deserves his wage which the Bible bears witness to. The aim of the union is to see to it that the labourer gets his wage with all the benefits there from. To see to it that he is not endangered and victimized, he is given his due and treated with respect due his efforts. It is only when these needs are not met that he resorts to another language, a language whose sound is better imagined than heard. Finally, let us re-echo this writer in an earlier work that, "the challenge which faces communication (Trade Unions/Government/Management/Public Relations) in peace building (collective bargaining) is to ensure that violence does not have a fertile ground to germinate and grow," (Anyanwu, 2008, p.763).

1.5 Recommendations

Based on the foregoing, it is recommended among others that:

* Collective bargaining is a necessity for industrial harmony and should be recognized by all parties involved.
* It is imperative that all parties respect and honour the agreements reached through collective bargaining as its violation results into industrial dispute.

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* All staff in the managerial cadre should know how to use and manage information especially when issuing instructions.
* All stakeholders, whether managerial, employees or otherwise, work for the interest of the organization and as such should respect the positions of one another.
* The organization is part of the community as the community is part of the organization. Both are part and parcel of the environment and what affects one necessarily rubs off on the other. Thus, the good of the environment is to the benefit of all parties.

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[18] NB: This paper is a conceptual work and not empirical as remarked by the assessor, as such, it is not expected to adopt the empirical method because no research questions were raised or answered.