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The Practice Of Industrial Relations In Indigenous Entrepreneurial Organization In Nigeria

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Abstract:

The paper considers industrial relations as all activities concerned with the determination and enforcement of terms and conditions of employment. The focus is in all aspects of employment relationship. It notes that small and medium scale organizations are the largest employers of labour 70 to 80% of employed people in the sub-sector. The paper reports the practice of industrial relations among studied indigenous entrepreneurial organizations in Nigeria. It noted that most of the conditions and terms of employment with these groups of organization unwritten but that the parties, the employees and employers, however, based their actions on implicit trust. From an empirical evidence of a study there is the practice by the entrepreneurs of accommodating some unusual demands e.g. asking for cash advances, permissions to attend to social functions, and so on, because most employees have some other forms of links with the entrepreneurs, apart from the employment relationship. Consequently rigid adherences to specified conditions do not often work. A number of lapses are highlighted and suggestions for improvement noted, especially with emphasis on aligning the industrial relations practice of the SME with the prevailing circumstance in the business environment.

Key words: Industrial relations, Entrepreneurship, Small business, Unitary, Pluralism, Marxism

1.Introduction

Considerable researches and writing have been devoted to small and medium scale entrepreneurs or owners very little attention has been devoted to small business workers. Researchers and writers on small business studies and writings on entrepreneurial organizations have focused on their origin or emergence, behaviour, performance and failure, (Ogundele, 2000). But in most of these studies and writings the focuses are on the owners of the organizations without much consideration for their employee's relations aspect of their organizations. Boer Thomas and Webster (1997) observed that there can be few areas of small business activity less well researched and understood than that of their employment relations. They note that this observation is perhaps surprising on two grounds. Firstly, the job creation potential of small firms in today's economy, Secondly, the majority of people involved in small business occupy roles as employees rather than as small business men (including those who hold managerial and/or professional titles). They are not often mentioned in any direct sense. The small and medium organizations are equated all too often with a single individual the owner-manager.

The concern of this paper is to present, based on empirical research the practice of industrial relations of a group of indigenous entrepreneurial organizations in Nigeria. This calls for a revisit of data in Ogundele (2000) that discussed several aspect of entrepreneurial behaviour in Nigeria. But the segment of interest is on the relations between the employers (entrepreneurs) and their employees (workers) within the political and legal framework. The paper examined the constructs in industrial relations practice. Data from Ogundele (2000) will present the state of the art of small business organization in their industrial relations practice. Recommendation and suggestions for future studies conclude the paper.

2. Conceptual Clarification

2.1. Industrial Relations

Industrial Relations is concerned primarily with the relationships between employers' organizations, trade union and sometimes involving a third-party government, such that the parties establish patterns of rules and procedures that regulate employment conditions. Salamon (2000) notes that industrial relations encompasses a set of the phenomena both inside and outside the workplace, concerned with determining and regulating employment relationship. Akubiro (2004) noted that it is essentially a process of job regulation involving the study of the ways in which rules governing employment are not only established, but also charged, interpreted and administered. Added to these, it deals with all aspects of collective bargaining between employers and trade unions, industrial conflicts and the processes of government intervention in normal employment relations. In the views of Fajana (2000) Industrial Relations is concerned with the systematic study of all aspects of the employments relationship which affects the employee from the time he/she joins the organisation until he/she leaves the job. Akpala (1983) noted that industrial relations is a collective function whose actors, including a hierarchy of workers, a hierarchy of employers and the government and/or its agencies.

Therefore industrial relations is a focus on the parties and processes in which employment rules are made, interpreted and administered. It involves employers or employers' associations, the management bodies or entrepreneurs, workers or trade unions or workers association, government departments or ministries, and all other bodies that are connected with employment matters. Because the process of collective bargaining have played a crucial role, since pre-independence era up to date, in making employment rules in Nigeria, it has been the major focus of discussions on industrial relations in Nigeria.

2.1.1. Approaches To Industrial Relations

There are several approaches or perspectives of viewing industrial relations. Salamon (2000) noted that all the approaches involve a mixture of assumptions and convictions, that is, implicit socio-political or ethical values and beliefs. They also involve descriptions, explanation and prediction, that is, discussion or analysis of what is and proposition of how it might develop. And they also aid prescription, that is, suggestions of what ought to be done or how it ought to be done to achieve desired objectives. This mixture of assumptions, description and prescription, will be employed as analytical method of our discussions of the practice of industrial relation of small-scale organizations based on empirical evidence in Nigeria. Three approaches: unitary, pluralistic and Marxist out of several others will be focused upon in this paper because of their relevance in varying degrees to small business organization in Nigeria.

2.1.1.1. Unitary Perspective

Ejione (1983) notes that the unitary approach or frame of reference is a management ideology, which regards the company or the organization as comparable to a family in which there is a common goal and a common interest pursued by every member. Salamon (2000) states that the unitary perspective assumes the organization is or should be an integrated group of people with a single authority/loyalty structure and a set of common values, interest and objectives shared by all members of the organization. Management prerogative is regarded as legitimate, natural and accepted and any opposition to it formal or informal, internal or external is seen as irrational. Consequently, trade unions are deemed unnecessary and conflict is perceived as disruptive and pathological.

2.1.1.2. Pluralistic Perspective

This perspective views society as being post capitalist. That is a relatively widespread distribution of authority and power within the society, a separation of ownership from management and a separation, acceptance and institutionalization of a political and industrial conflict (Salamon, 2000) noted that this perspective assumes that the organization is composed of individuals who organize themselves into a variety of district sectional groups, each with its own interests, objectives and leadership. The organization is thus multi-structural and competitive in terms of leaderships, authority and loyalty within the groups consequently there is a complex of tension and competing claims, which is managed in the interest of maintaining a viable collaborative structure. Conflicts that often result represent total range of behaviours and attitudes that express opposition and divergent orientation. In a nutshell, there is recognition of divergent interests, trade unions and conflict is functional (Oginni and Faseyiku, 2012).

2.1.1.3. Marxist Perspective

It contends that in capitalist societies, the state is always on the side of the employers in an effort to protect the interest of those who own other means of production except labour. This perspective sees the processes of the institution of joint regulation as enhancement rather than reduction in management position, that at best, they give only limited and short-term accommodation of the inherent and fundamental division within the capitalist based work and social structures (Salamon, 2000). Therefore, the growth of trade union is seen as an inevitable employee's response to capitalism. That trade union not only enhances collective industrial power by reducing competition between individual workers but provide a focus for the expression and protection of the interests of the working classes. Conflict is thus a permanent feature of industrial relations (Oginni and Faseyiku, 2012).

Table 1 below provides the basic assumptions of each of these perspectives, the nature of conflict generated, their resolution and the role of trade union.

Assumptions	Unitary	Pluralist	Marxist
	Capitalist	Post-capitalist society	Capitalist society
	Integrated group of people	Coalescence of sectional groups	Division between Labour and capital
	Common values, interests and objectives	Different values, interests and objectives	Imbalance inequalities in society (e.g. power, economic wealth)
Nature of conflict	Single authority & loyalty structure (management's)	Competitive authority & loyalty structures (formal & informal)	Inherent in economic and social systems
	Irrational & frictional	Inevitable, rational & structural	Disorder precursor to change
Resolution of conflict	Coercion	Compromise and agreement	Change society
Role of trade union	Intrusion from outside	Legitimate	Employee response to capital capitalism
	Historical anachronism	Internal and integral to work org.	Expression and mobilization of class consciousness
	Only accepted in economic relation (if forced)	Accepted role in both economic and managerial relations	Develop political awareness and activity

Table 1: Unitary, Pluralist & Marxist Approaches

Source: Salamon, M. (2000,6) *Industrial Relations Theory And Practice, 4th Edition, London: Pearson Education Ltd*

Salamon (2000) noted that industrial relations should be viewed not just as simple organisation job regulation terms but in broader, social, political and economic terms. It is integrated with and not separated from the political and economic spheres. Earlier on Lawal (1993) notes that industrial relations is more than issues such as trade unionism, collective bargaining or strikes, but entails the whole range of reaction among the employee, employer and the government under which the terms and conditions of employment are regulated.

2.2. Entrepreneur

Ogundele (2000) defines an entrepreneur, as the innovative individual who establishes a new productive organization where none existed before. He/she manages such organization through the initial problems of survival and nurtures it to state of stability and self-sustaining growth. He/she in short is an empire builder. In the views of Oginni et al (2004) an entrepreneur is someone who constantly scans the environment for information that would be translated into business opportunities thus heralding innovation that would improve the environment and the inhabitants. The entrepreneur in question can be solo, dual and copreneur.

2.3. Small Business

The 3d Nigerian national Development Plan (1975-1980) defines small business as a manufacturing establishment that employs less than 10 people and whose investment on machinery and equipment do not exceed N600,000.00 (six hundred thousand naira). The Central Bank of Nigeria, in 1995, in its credit guidelines defined small business enterprises as any business or an organization with an annual turnover of not less than five hundred thousand naira. Ogundele (2000) defines small business organization as one employing a minimum of five employees and with the initial capital outlay of not less than N5,000.00 (five thousand naira) when such organizations were established between 1972 and 1986. Okongwu (2001) stated that small business enterprises in Nigeria are classified with regard to employed labour force and capital investment by the National Council on industry. Osagwu (2001) noted that an additional requirement, to be tagged small scale enterprise in Nigeria, is that the number of employee is not greater than 50, in any situation and the financial capital outlay is not more than N150,000.00 (one hundred thousand naira).

The above definitions show that different individuals, institutions and bodies have given various definition of small business. It is therefore, difficult to have a generally accepted definition of small business enterprises. The best one can say, is that a small business may be viewed as a business unit, which is independently owned and managed and which does not dominate its relevant market segment of interest. Based on this, small business enterprises may be said to have the following features or characteristics: few numbers of employees, low amount of capital investment and annual turnover, relatively small in size, local in the scope of operation within the industries and managers are also owners.

2.4. The Small Business Employer And Industrial Relations

In his study of indigenous entrepreneurs in Nigeria, Ogundele (2000) employed a combination of questionnaire, case study and observation methods of data collection to enhance the quality of information obtained. From this study he was able to obtain information on employment and employee relations, which will be examined shortly. However, several other sources that focused

on entrepreneurial organizations consulted in the course of writing this paper do not have relevant information on industrial relations practice of small business organization.

Kilby (1971) examined the origin and performance of indigenous entrepreneurs in Nigeria. Harns (1971) examined the structure and performance of indigenous entrepreneurs' organizations. Akeredolu Ale (1975) focused on the origin and performance of indigenous entrepreneurs. Osoba (1987) and his team of researchers work on small-scale industries in Nigeria (1982-1985), were similar to the previous studies. They found that the following factors affected the performance of the studied entrepreneurs: political legislation, technology, various economic issues psychological factor, education and training, information support system, management and cultural environment.

Inegbenebor (1995) examine the structures of small and medium scale enterprises in relation to their performance of a group indigenous entrepreneur. The Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), Federal Office of Statistics (FOS) and Nigerian Institute for Social and Economic Research (NISER) (2001) in-depth survey of the Nigerian informal sector, examined several aspects of the functioning of the small business but leave out the industrial relations aspect. Dauda (2004) examined the employment creation the informal sector in Nigeria. None of these work focused on industrial relation practice of small business organization.

Lawal etal (2000) that focus on industrial relations in their work and small scale business examined it within the general framework of industrial relations of big organizations with emphasis on trade union, collective bargaining and conflict management. Akpala (1983) examines the Nigerian traditional culture and its possible effect on industrial relations, and notes that there are certain values and attitudes generated in the traditional, economic and work relations, which could be brought into industrial relations. He notes further that the traditional sector is a raw area of research and that the problem of scantiness of literature in the field of traditional economic (informal sector) and work relation is not peculiar to Nigerian situation. That in Japan, Bennet and Ishino (1963) surveyed the literature and found few studies of paternalistic relationship in economic organization. That writers in comparative industrial relations are aware of the importance of paternalism, but have discussed it only in general terms.

Boer etal (1997) noted that the industrial relations aspect of small businesses is less researched and understood. Those two stereotypes have dominated the views on employment relations in small business firm: the minority, which has "sweatshop" conditions and the majority of business who have "industrial harmony". They expressed the concern that those views did not derive from an adequate empirical base.

From the above discussion, it is clear that researchers on industrial relations have neglected a major segment of the labour force in every country, developed, developing and underdeveloped one.

2.5. Empirical Evidence Of Industrial Relation Practice In Nigerian Small Business Organization

The data contained in this segment are drawn essentially from Ogundele (2000) study of indigenous entrepreneur in Nigeria. As stated earlier the survey study employed a mix bag of questionnaire, case study and observation method. The entrepreneurs of the study were of two categories. First are the private entrepreneurs (PEs) and second, is the National Directorate of Employment Assisted Entrepreneurs (NDEAEs). The PEs were members of Nigerians Association of small scale industrialists (NASSI) this represents association of employers at a lower level. The NDEAEs have satisfied specific standards laid down by the government Agency-National Directorate of Employment to qualify them as beneficiaries of the government finance and training programme. The study was conducted in Lagos, Oyo and Osun states of Nigeria. A total of 144 entrepreneurs were involved in the study.

Part of the qualifications for inclusions in the stud for PEs is a minimum of 5 employees. But in the case of the NDEAEs this restriction was not imposed as such some of them had less than five employees.

Table 2 below displays the varying sizes of number of employee in the organizations of the entrepreneurs studied.

Number of Employee	PEs (n=74)		NDEAEs (n=70)		Total (n=144)	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
1-10 Employee(s)	33	44.59	51	72.86	84	58.33
11-20 Employees	27	36.49	13	18.57	40	27.77
21 and above not indicated	14	18.92	2	2.86	16	11.19
Total	74	100.00	70	100.00	144	100.00

Table 2: Size Of Employees

Source: Ogundele O.J.K. *Determinants Of Entrepreneurial Emergence, Behaviour And Performance In Nigeria*, Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University Of Lagos, Akoka

In Table 2 above the majority of the organizations had in their employment 10 or less employees. The minimum numbers of employees for the PEs were 5 people but some of the NDEAEs organizations were in the group of 1-10 employees. They were established between 1989 and the period of the field survey and were still struggling to establish their foothold. On the other hand, some of the PEs organization had been in existence for over 40 years prior to the time of the study.

Based on the number of employees and the authors' observation of the patterns of arrangement in PEs organizations that were used as case study, below depicts the typical entrepreneurs' organization structure is as shown in Figure 1 below;

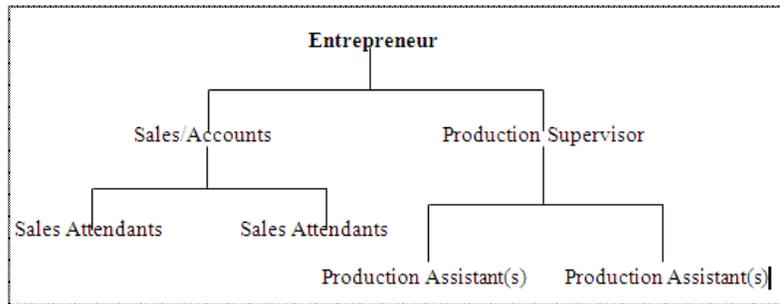


Figure 1: Structure Of Typical Entrepreneurs' Organization

Source: Ogundele O.J.K. (2000 Pg.136) *Determinants Of Entrepreneurial Emergence, Behaviour And Performance Unpublished Ph.D Thesis, University Of Lagos, Akoka*

When Table 2 and Figure 1 are taken together it could be seen that small business or entrepreneurial organizations exhibit simple structure. This means that the owner of the small business is in very close contact with everybody that works with his/her organization. This closeness in contact with everybody by the boss is an important characteristic of organization with simple structure and it has several implications in the practice of industrial relations of this group of organization. The methods of communication inside the entrepreneur's organization are contained in Table 3 below,

	PEs (n=74)		NDEAEs (n=70)	
	F	%	F	%
Free-to-Face	74	96.10	70	89.74
Written	2	2.60	5	6.41
Telephone	1	1.30	3	3.85
Total	77	100.00	78	100.00

Table 3: Methods Of Communication With Employees By Entrepreneur

Source: Ogundele O.J.K. (2000 Pg.137) *Determinants Of Entrepreneurial Emergence, Behaviour And Performance Unpublished Ph.D Thesis, University Of Lagos, Akoka*

The most frequently used method of communication by the entrepreneurs as shown in Table 3 above was the face-to-face method. Next to this was written method of communication. The implication of the use of face to face method of communication mostly by the PEs and NDEAEs was that it enabled them to exert control over the operation of their organizations and to read the mood of their employees, this also has implications for industrial relations practice. Added to this was the finding that most of the PEs and NDEAEs spent 40-80% of their work time contacts with their employees.

Table 4 below exhibits the responses of the entrepreneurs as to the use of subordinate initiatives in Decision-making.

	PEs (n=74)		NDEAEs (n=70)	
	F	%	F	%
Very often	4	5.4	8	11.4
Often	53	71.6	31	44.3
Not often	17	23.0	31	44.3
Total	74	100.00	78	100.00

Table 4: Use Of Subordinate Initiatives In Decision-Making

Source: Ogundele O.J.K. (2000 Pg.137) *Determinants Of Entrepreneurial Emergence, Behaviour And Performance Unpublished Ph.D Thesis, University Of Lagos, Akoka*

It is to be noted that in Table 4 above 71.6% of the PEs claimed that they often made use of subordinates' initiatives in decision-making while 44.3% of the NDEAEs also made similar claims. The difference in the pattern reported above between the PEs and NDEAEs was due to the fact that all the PEs were in the food processing industry where subordinates often gave advice or even took decisions on products preservation. This also has implications for industrial relations practice of small business.

In Table 5 below is contained data relating to the level of delegation of authority to the subordinates by the entrepreneurs.

	PEs (n=74)		NDEAEs (n=70)		Total (n=144)	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
High	6	8.1	5	7.1	11	7.64
Moderate	42	56.8	52	74.3	94	65.28
Low	26	35.1	13	18.6	39	27.08
Total	74	100.00	70	100.00	144	100.00

Table 5: Delegation Of Authority

Source: Ogundele O.J.K. (2000 Pg.137) *Determinants Of Entrepreneurial Emergence, Behaviour And Performance Unpublished Ph.D Thesis, University Of Lagos, Akoka*

Data in Table 5 above showed that higher percentage of both group of entrepreneurs delegated moderate level of authority to their subordinates. This has the implication of giving the same degree of relevance and importance in the organization vis-a-vis large organization. It also has implication for industrial relations practice of small business.

2.6.Industrial Harmony

Based on the features of and use of fundamental human behavioural skills of pattern of communication, decision-making, delegation of authority and close interactions outlined above, there is very high level of proximity among the employees and employers. Consequently the practice of industrial relations in small organizations between the employers and workers and among the workers themselves is such as to promote the spirit of cooperation, mutual respect, and moral attachment, which Boer, et al (1997) call industrial harmony. This represents a unitary perspective described earlier on. The organization in a small firm is seen as a team having common source of loyalty one focus of effort and leader. Trade union in this respect becomes unnecessary and conflict, which can be the result of poor communication and personality clashes, is minimized. The pluralistic and Marxist perspectives are not applicable with respect to small business.

2.7.The Family Setting

One important feature of the studied group is that very significant proportions of the employees are family members of friends and close associate in the employment of the entrepreneur organization. Consequently paternalism and fraternalism dominates the relationship between owners/managers and workers. This again tends to minimize conflict because of the close contact between the boss and employees and the use of face-to-face mode of communication. Boer, et al (1997) noted that sociology of ethics relation school, in particular, describes how the family has often been seen as critical to the success of small enterprise more so that the most these SMB were embedded in co entrepreneurship.

2.8.Expression Of Conflict

Consequent upon the internal structuring of the entrepreneurial organization described earlier on, it is relatively unusual to have strikes. This is due firstly, to the close interaction with the boss. Secondly due to the fact, as noted by Boer et al (1997) that numbers with common interest are small and trade unions may be unable or unwilling to organize workers, in the absence of trade unions may be unable or unwilling to organize workers, in the absence of trade unions support for collective action is hard to carry out. Therefore employees' conflict in small business is expressed in individual forms in terms of labour turnover absenteeism and dispensary visit. On the hand, the employee may display a negative attitude as a result of dissatisfaction with the terms and conditions of work, which may be very serious for the organization. For example, one of the findings of the group of entrepreneurs studied was the acts of indiscipline which was found to be the second most important problem facing the organizations. The acts of indiscipline listed included theft, lateness to work, and various unethical conducts.

However, open conflicts are often uncommon because of the social relations, of network of family members and members of family of close associates. The result was that job related problems were resolved in outside social settings as well as outside the office. Bowen and Steyaert (1990) noted that entrepreneurial organization results in the development of a social network with acts as motivation for both the entrepreneur and co-worker thus minimizing conflicts.

In addition, the entrepreneurs, as the needs arise accommodate the request from the workers for financial support when they are in straitened positions and is not yet time for payment of salary. Another social arrangement which tend to minimize conflict is the ease with which worker ask for and obtain permission to attend social functions and ceremonies. It should be noted that most Nigerians like ceremonies, an organization that does not seriously infringe on this attitude may be minimizing conflicts informally.

3.Conclusion

It has been noted at the beginning of the paper that there is little empirical study of the industrial relations in small business labour market, is a major sector of the labour market in any economy, it is surprising that substantial material is not available, which seek to analyse and understand small business industrial relation more fully. The practice is that most writers emphasize the existence of industrial harmony. Small businesses based on the evidences presented above present different employers-employees relations than those faced by big firms. This is because, as noted by Boer et al (1997) relying on incidences of collective action inadequately reveals the nature of conflict in small businesses where individual action is more likely to be significant.

A number of features of the small business were noted above first, the entrepreneurs and family at work. Then there is simple structure, which results in intimate control of the organization. There is also face-to-face contact, which tends to minimize communication problem, as entrepreneur could read the feeling of members of his organization at any point in time. Also, greater percentage of work time contact was reported as spent with subordinates the modal group spent 61-80% of work time contract with subordinates. In addition the entrepreneurs often made use of subordinates' initiatives in decision-making as 58.38% of the combined groups reported the use of subordinates' initiatives in decision making. However there was low level of delegation of authority, as such the entrepreneurs were powerful and dominated their organization (Kets de Vries, 1985). The last feature may result in labour turnover. To this extent, the practice of Industrial relations among indigenous small business organisations is more of unitary perspective than pluralism and marxism.

4. Recommendations

On the basis of the above findings and discussion, the researchers recommended that

- Entrepreneurs should concentrate more on the human factors rather than non human factors in order to take the advantage of the dynamic nature of human factors and its sensitivity among other factors.
- There is need to shift emphasis of the study of industrial relations in small firms from the past focus on emergence, behaviour and performance to the one that would not arrogate power and absolute control of means of production to the owner.
- The line of relationship should be well defined in favour formal interaction without prejudice to the informal interaction setting to avoid unbridled abuse of relationship and subjective decisions.
- Family issues should be made distant from the business operations i.e non interference of domestic matters in business matters. The two should be treated as a separate entity in order to make the business to focus on business activities without distraction from any angle.
- There should be practice of joint consultation most especially on matter of concern or interest to employees. It is a general belief that joint authorship in decision making do encourages support and implementation.
- There should be in place a formal procedure for complaints and redress seeking. The is a way to provide a frame work by which the business environment could be measured or gauged in terms of tension and conflict
- The focus of industrial relations practice in these small businesses should be designed to reflect and accommodate the prevailing circumstances in terms of economic, culture and political as well as technological environment of business organizations.

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