IMPERATIVES OF SOCIAL DIALOGUE IN NATION BUILDING

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ABSTRACT

The dynamic and complex political and business environment calls for a harmonious relationship among stakeholders. This study examined the imperatives of nation building by critically discussing the concepts of nation building and the meaning, dimensions, levels and usefulness of social dialogue. Strategies such as joint consultations, effective and efficient communication networks, stakeholder relationships, commitment to continuous learning, and capacity building are identified and discussed in building a prosperous nation and a harmonious workplace. The study concludes that building a prosperous nation and a harmonious workplace devoid of 'unmanageable' civil and industrial crises can be created through result-oriented dialogue.

Keywords: Crisis, Joint consultation, Nation building, Organisation, Social dialogue.

INTRODUCTION

Conflicts are an inextricable part of people's life. While some people view conflicts as a problem that must be avoided at all costs, others see them as a circumstance that needs to be appropriately managed (Verwimp, Justin & Brück, 2019). Conflicts may not necessarily be viewed as a claw on developmental wheel, but a catalytic agent for setting standard and competitiveness among people and organisations. For some people, disagreement may be an exciting opportunity for personal and professional development, if handled well. Conflicts arise in workplace and society at large due to divergent value systems, perceptions, and interests of people. Individual interests and ideals usually clash with those of others, whether at home or workplace, making this a social phenomenon that affects everyone daily (Akinmayowa, 2012; Kondic & Balic, 2019). Workplace conflicts appear unavoidable since the business's primary goal is profit maximization, while the agitation of unions is in securing and maintaining well-paid jobs with high-class conditions of service for their members (Akinmayowa, 2012). Aside from the gap between management goals and workers' interests, the dynamic nature of a business environment that the enterprise has to cope with to survive influences the stakeholders

in the workplace in different spheres that could lead to an unending source of conflicts (Adekunle & Ahonkhai, 2019).

Some scholars have identified disagreement or conflict as an inevitable aspect of every workplace and society since people in the organisation have diverse opinions, beliefs, interests, and perceptions about setting goals and how to achieve them (Akinmayowa, 2012; Mbah & Ifeanyi, 2012; Fajana & Shadare, 2012; Omisore & Abiodun, 2014; Schmidt & Islam, 2022). At the organisational level, employees may disagree with management due to perceived injustice in resource allocation, goal differences, authority relationships, roles and expectations, and jurisdictional ambiguities (Omisore & Abiodun, 2014). Failing to peacefully and harmoniously resolve disagreements in the workplace, especially between employees (union) and management, has many detrimental implications. Unresolved labour differences can result in striking action by unions in which workers leave their jobs until the issue is settled. Also, the union can organize picketing.[1]. Boycotting is another option that unions could explore by ensuring that workers and other consumers are urged to refrain from buying an employer's products. Both the party against which the actions are directed and the entire economy would be negatively affected whenever any of these measures are taken. Such actions would result in economic and financial losses, loss of goodwill by the organisation due to the inability to meet customers' demand, and additional expenditure incurred in safeguarding organisational assets and dealing with other effects of the industrial crisis.

In light of this, there is a need for a harmonious workplace where both employers and employees' expectations are met to a large extent. Additionally, this will contribute to creating a peaceful and wealthy country where the aspirations of the populace are fulfilled. This can be ensured when both sides work diligently to pursue and attain organizational goals harmoniously by ensuring that employees are engaged and feel more valued. They will be more productive as a result, which will improve organizational and national outputs (Osabuohien & Ogunrinola, 2007; Lindley, 2022).

This paper is divided into four main sections. A background discussion on the subject is provided in the first section, which is the introduction. The second section discusses the concepts of nation building and social dialogue. The strategies for deploying social dialogue to build harmonious workplace and a prosperous nation are outlined and discussed in section three. The final section, section four, contains the concluding remarks.

CONCEPTUALISING NATION BUILDING

As explained by Cornelius and Greg (2013), nation-building is the process of fostering a sense of belonging and cohesiveness among diverse groups inside the state. Nwabughuogu (2004) described nation building as involving the creation of a favourable environment that will sustain the sense of love developed by the individuals and groups for the nation-state. Unya and Onyemauwa (2022) defined nation building as the national integration and consolidation processes that help people and groups develop a passion for their country and come to terms

[1] *A practice whereby workers congregate outside their work places to publicise their position on issues bothering them.*

with their commitment to the nation state. Its goal is to unite the nation's citizens from within and beyond to achieve sustainable development to maintain long-term political stability and viability. Nation building, therefore, could mean a process of instilling a sense of love for one's country and accepting one's devotion to a nation-state in individuals and groups. It serves as the cornerstone of economic growth and development, allows people to exercise their rights and obligations, enhances access to resources, and boosts the capability of local institutions.

The concept of nation building has helped many countries and regions to connect socially, economically, and culturally because of this idea. However, nation building has become very challenging in Nigeria because the Nigerian leaders perceived it as an elite enterprise. In contrast, other countries and their leaders understood that it is a complex and protracted political process that involves leaders and the general populace (Unya & Onyemauwa, 2022). As identified by Gambari (2008), and Unya and Onyemauwa (2022), nation building, especially in Nigeria, is challenged by several factors. These factors include a lack of committed and transparent leadership, a high level of corruption, historical legacies of colonial rule, socio-economic inequalities, constitutional challenges, and the challenge of institution building.

Nation building can take many forms, such as investing heavily in infrastructure or using propaganda to promote social cohesion and spur economic development. It could also entail the development of national symbols, such as national holidays, flags, anthems, national sports teams, national stadiums, national languages, and national heroes and myths. Nation building, on a deeper level, integrates several ethnic groups into a single national unit. This can be particularly difficult in former colonies because colonial governments tended to separate, dominate, and stifle regional social, ethnic, religious, and cultural evolution.

There are three fundamental principles on which nation-building and national integration can be built (Kagame, 2010; Nweke, 2015; Unya & Onyemauwa, 2022). The first principle is the deliberate development of a national identity, or a sense of belonging, based on shared values, tradition, history, and aspirations. The second is the creation of institutions and regulations of governance that formalize the interaction between the people in power and the people receiving their services. The third principle is the involvement of citizens in the governing process by adopting the framework that best serves them in selecting their leaders and actively participating in decision-making.

SOCIAL DIALOGUE: *Meaning, dimensions, levels, and usefulness*

Isaacs (1993) described the dialogue as a persistent, collaborative inquiry into the mechanisms, presumptions, and certainties underlying everyday experience. Schein (1993) considered dialogue as a fundamental process required to build consensus that allowed individuals to understand the concealed meanings of words by unveiling and comprehending them in a simple language.

Various institutions and scholars have defined the concept of social dialogue differently. According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO, 2013: 39) definition, social dialogue includes "*all types of negotiations, consultations, and exchange of information between and*

among representatives of governments, employers and workers on issues of common interest relating to economic or social policy". Fajana and Shadare (2012) described social dialogue as exchanging ideas and information through social conversation that may eventually lead to peaceful labour relations. Visser (2001) defines social dialogue as the initial building block for a shared understanding or frame of reference by separating the digestion of facts, issues, and potential solutions that could lead to collective bargaining when social partners discuss their points of view. Hethy (2000) describes social dialogue as a system of institutions for reconciling interests on labour and economic issues by government, business, and labour representatives. Choi (2000) argues that social dialogue entails direct negotiations among social partners.

Based on the above definitions, social dialogue is a process that involves government representatives, employers of labour and workers/union to formulate socio-economic policies of common interest to stakeholders. Social dialogue is a technique that can be used strategically to pursue economic development and build consensus on issues relating to the workplace and the nation. Therefore, social dialogue helps to promote industrial peace by entrenching and strengthening democratic governance.

Forms or Dimensions of Social Dialogue

There are two forms of social dialogue. They are tripartite and bipartite. Tripartite social dialogue involves the participation of workers/unions, representatives of employees and government on "equal footing" in making decisions. In its tripartite form, dialogue entails mutual understanding among government representatives, employers of labour and workers/union to formulate and implement policies on labour, social and economic matters (ILO, 2002 cited in Fajana & Shadare, 2012). The bipartite relationship includes employers of labour and workers/unions, where the government plays a mediating role in defining the boundary for interactions between the parties (Fajana & Shadare, 2012). Bipartite social dialogue is a part of tripartism, in which the government plays the role of provider of the legal framework or the labour laws within which industrial relation operates. Here, the government can also serve as a conciliator or arbiter if insoluble disputes may arise between parties. According to Bikoloni (2015:5), "social dialogue can exist as a tripartite process, with the government as an official party to the dialogue or it may consist of bipartite relations only between labour and management (or trade unions and employers' organizations), with or without indirect government involvement". Fajana and Shadare (2012) assert that both forms could be advisory to the government or may be engaged in the negotiation that will result in a formidable consensus.

Levels of Social Dialogue

Reinecke, Donaghey, and Hoggarth (2017) outlined four levels of social dialogue. These include, in sequential order: information sharing mechanism, consultative mechanism, negotiation mechanism, and joint-decision making. These levels are diagrammatically represented and discussed as follows:

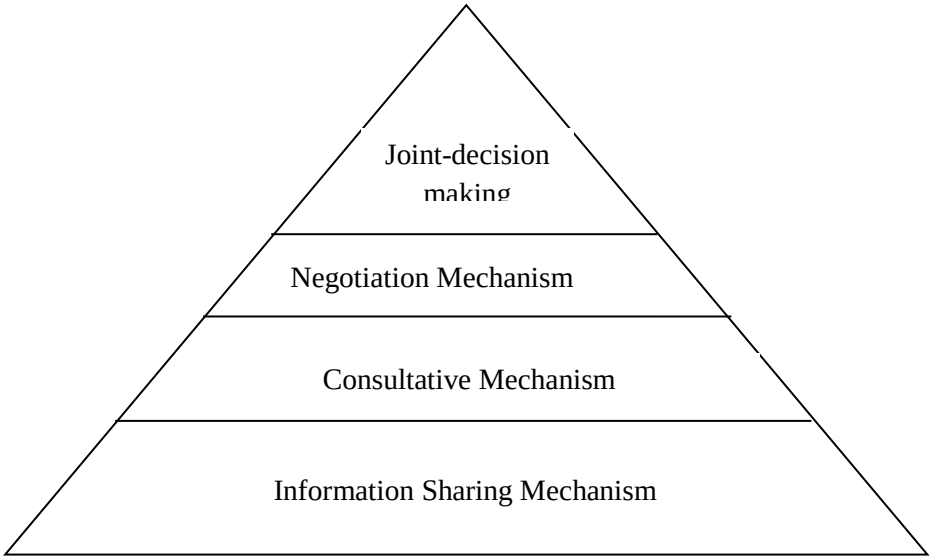


Figure 1: The Pyramid of dialogue, adapted from Reinecke *et al.* (2017).

Information sharing mechanism: Information sharing, as defined by Karakutuk (2011), is the process of sharing emotions, thoughts, and information between two or several parties. The interaction between parties enables the sharing and circulation of expertise, skills, knowledge, and overall competencies between the parties (Miles, 2003). Parties disseminate information and give updates on changes that are useful for building trust, advancing mutual understanding on issues fundamental to the group, and pushing for transparency (Reinecke *et al.*, 2017).

Consultative mechanism: There is a need for consultation among parties involved to develop workable solutions to problems. Consultation will create awareness among the parties involved, allowing for effective dialogue and consensus on proposals (Reinecke *et al.*, 2017).

Negotiation mechanism: Negotiation is an act of strategic conduct through which two or more individuals/parties, who are in a situation of interdependence, attempt to reach an agreement or common ground in relation to an issue, position or subject over which they differ or feel that they differ (Iyayi, 2006). Negotiation mechanism involves building on a previous arrangement to enhance the contribution from the other party to find lasting solutions to the problem.

Joint decision making: This stage integrates all the other stages (information sharing mechanism, consultative mechanism, and negotiation mechanism) to give room for a formal decision-making platform. According to Reinecke *et al.* (2017), the aim at this stage is to create lasting and binding change or solution to an identified problem.

Usefulness of Social Dialogue

The adoption of social dialogue offers many benefits. Social dialogue can be used to promote firm democratic values, deal with labour-related disharmony, empower the less powerful in the organisation, create coherence, and foster communication. It helps build group members'

capacities to manage crises, generate solutions to problems, and improve people's lives (Bikoloni, 2015; Thamarajakshi, 2001).

Grimshaw, Koukiadaki, and Tavora (2017) identified the potential benefits of social dialogue to include: raising productivity through effective utilisation of labour, promoting inclusiveness in the employment contract, increasing participation of workers, enhancing workers' access to social protection and better pay, better information flows, among others.

ILO (2011) outlines the use of social dialogue to include building consensus and widespread involvement among stakeholders in the workplace; creation of ownership among parties over economic, social, and environmental issues; reducing conflicts and advancing industrial peace by ensuring better labour protection; providing parties with platforms for contributing to the process of building conditions for decent work; increasing the possibility of the acceptance of outcomes by a broader spectrum of societal representatives; and minimizing the possibilities of conflicts, among others.

Mariani (2013) categorized the usefulness of social dialogue into three parts: national, business, and workers. At the national level, social dialogue helps to reduce inequalities, while at the business level, it helps to increase productivity and reduce disruption. At the workers' level, social dialogue helps workers to express their concerns, participate in decision making and enhance employee engagement.

STRATEGIES FOR DEPLOYING SOCIAL DIALOGUE IN NATION BUILDING

Can two walk together unless they are agreed? (Amos 3:3, The New King James Version). This scriptural injunction underscores the importance of engaging in dialogue and building consensus to achieve goals that will lead to national development. Due to the dynamic nature of the workplace and the business environment, stakeholders need strategic partnership in dialoguing and building consensus that will guarantee good quality labour-management relationship (Adekunle & Ahonkhai, 2019; Mbah & Ifeanyi, 2012). In advancing a harmonious relationship in the workplace and society, the following strategies have been identified to promote social dialogue. These strategies include joint consultations, effective and efficient communication networks, stakeholder relationships, commitment to continuous learnings, and capacity buildings.

Joint consultation: Fajana and Shadare (2012) described joint consultation as a two-way communication approach that can be used to resolve disputes arising from matters of common interest. According to Armstrong (2003:36), "joint consultation enables managers and employee representatives to meet regularly in order to exchange views and utilize member's knowledge and expertise in dealing with matters of common interests that are not the subject of collective bargaining". Joint consultation goes beyond informing, it entails deliberate effort by management to seek the views of workers on plans of management to introduce changes. In decision making, management must trust and engage employees and their unions. Similarly, unions must genuinely participate in the decision-making process to advance the interests of their members instead of individuals in the union to become more relevant and powerful (Okpu & Jaja, 2014).

According to Fajana and Shadare (2012), joint consultation performs the following functions: it gives employees the prospect of improving policies through their submissions; it offers labour and management the opportunity to identify with and have a high opinion of each other's views and perceptions; it creates a forum for management and labour to share opinions and ideas on all matters touching their joint and several interests in the workplace before or after decisions have been made; it provides a workable method of associating employees with the running of the business; it helps in fostering co-operation between management and employees, and improves the quality of decisions by using the knowledge and experience of those most affected by those judgments.

Effective and efficient communication network: Communication involves sending and receiving information and fostering understanding between persons (Lunenburg, 2010). When the intended message is successfully transmitted, received, and understood by all parties, communication is deemed effective. Unarguably, organizations need result-oriented communication, whether downward, upward, or horizontal. For this to be achieved, barriers to effective communication must be addressed. For instance, overcoming language barriers requires the sender of the message to use the most specific and accurate words possible. For cultural barriers to be dealt with, the sender of the message should avoid projecting his own culture while trying to understand the background of others (Okhakhu & Adekunle, 2013). In the same manner, the individual barrier could be reduced if the parties to the communication are open-minded and show interest in what is being said. Ofuani and Ofuani (2010) observed that description, equality, openness, problem orientation, positive intent, and empathy are communication-encouraging behaviours that both boss and subordinates should embrace and practice for an effective interpersonal relationship in the workplace.

Fajana and Shadare (2012) found that managements sometimes feel reluctant to release information to the unions because information (especially accounting reports) may be misused. Unions, on the other hand, often claim they are entitled to know their employers' general and human resource management policies. Therefore, workers often desire to know what is happening and the extent to which their jobs are affected. To promote a harmonious relationship between labour and management, management needs continual dissemination of labour policy by management to avoid tension and spread of unnecessary gossip.

Different platforms can be used to promote social dialogue in the workplace as a means of employers' support for promoting effective interactions with workers, whether unionised or not. Some of these platforms include maintenance of industrial intranet connectivity, the publication of organisation-based journals and magazines, adoption of an open-door policy. This will allow individuals and groups to contribute their ideas in the management of the organisation, use of a suggestion box, involving the community and contract employees in the management of the business enterprise, among others (Ofuani & Ofuani, 2010; Fajana & Shadare, 2012; Okhakhu & Adekunle, 2013).

Stakeholder relationship: A stakeholder, according to Inegbenebor and Eheduru (1999:5), is an individual or group of individuals who have contributed to the company enterprise and as a result, have expectations of it. They are all the groups in an organization's environment that

have the potential to influence or be influenced by the decisions and policies of the organization. The social discourse and consensus-building processes involve numerous stakeholders. Government, businesses or their representatives, labour unions, social partners, and civil society activists are a few of these.

Which stakeholder interest receives the organisation's top priority depends on factors including power, legitimacy, and urgency. The degree to which the organisation depends on its stakeholders determines its level of power in this situation. The more dependent a group is, the more control and sway it has on the organisation's decision-making. The degree to which the stakeholders have a genuine claim to the organisation's resources is known as legitimacy. For instance, because it owns the land where the organization is located, the community has a valid claim to the organisation's attention. In order to address their concerns and prevent unfavourable outcomes, stakeholders put pressure on the organisation. This is referred to as urgency. For instance, the trade union might make a full-scale strike threat; this heightens the need to address the union's demands.

Stakeholder analysis grid is a commonly used stakeholder management tool. It involves "graphing" the relationships among stakeholders in terms of influence and interest. The tool can be used for identifying different kinds of actions to be taken in addressing stakeholders' interests and claims.

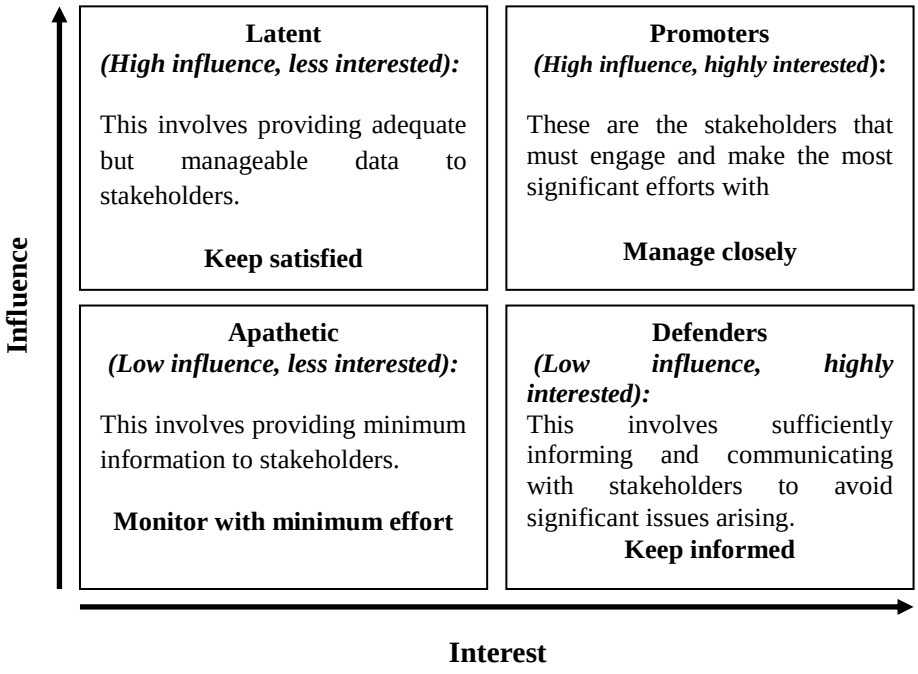


Figure 2: Stakeholders analysis grid adapted from Imperial College London Online Resources.

Commitment to continuous learning: The concept of the learning organisation revolves around the practices of organisational routines that support and encourage a continuous increase in knowledge at the individual, group/team and organisation levels (Marquardt & Banks, 2010).

Learning at the individual level occurs when organisations allow people to discuss mistakes openly to learn from them. It identifies skills needed for future work tasks, helps each other learn, views problems in their work as an opportunity to learn, gets money and other resources to support their learning, and provides them time to support learning. Moreso, learning at the individual level increases when such organisations reward people for learning and allow them to give open and honest feedback to one another, encouraging them to ask "why" regardless of rank. Learning at the individual level increases when individual employees are allowed to take calculated risks, experiment and engage in dialogue and inquiry. According to Watkins and Marsick (2003), "when individuals increased their capacity to learn, they could (collectively) enhance the overall capacity of the organisation to learn as long as it was receptive to their efforts to use their learning and put in place appropriate mechanisms to enable, support and reward the use of what was learned".

Team learning offers a broader perspective than individual learning because it is linked with sharing knowledge, insight, and vision (Marsick & Watkins, 1999). It involves social base relationships in the discovery of reality. Team learning fosters collective thinking, collective actions and open dialogue which facilitate capturing tacit knowledge within the organisation (Watkins & Marsick, 1996). Team learning is developed when an organisation provides freedom for or allows teams/groups to adapt their goals as needed and use the recommendations, discussions, and information emanating from the team to develop a culture of team reward for their achievements.

Capacity building: Dada (2004) defined capacity as "people, institutions, and practices that enable countries to achieve their developmental goals". Capacity building involves identifying and analyzing problems, making rational choices, formulating solutions, and implementing action plans to achieve set goals (World Bank, 1996). Ani (1997) explained that capacity building involves formulating plans, identifying and selecting viable options, and executing, monitoring, and evaluating implementation plans.

Muhtar (1997) highlighted the objective of capacity building to create the framework for identifying and analyzing problems and formulating and implementing solutions for enhancing sustainable human development. The essence of capacity building is to help change stakeholders' orientation to be result-oriented, acquire new knowledge and skills, and have attitudinal change. Regular training, workshops, and conferences can enhance the capacity of workers and trade unionists, and seminars to increase their knowledge, skills, and competence. Other measures include participation in planning, delegation of authority, and involvement in creative thinking.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Building a prosperous nation and a harmonious workplace devoid of 'unmanageable' civil and industrial crises can be created through result-oriented dialogue. Dialogue entails interaction in the workplace in an acceptable manner in making decisions on issues of joint and distinctive interests. The dynamic and complex political and business environment calls for a harmonious relationship among stakeholders which can be achieved by continuous dialogue. To fully harness the potentials inherent in social dialogue, this paper concludes that joint consultations, effective and efficient communication networks, stakeholder relationships, commitment to continuous learnings, and capacity building can be deployed by government and organisational leaders to build a prosperous nation and a harmonious workplace. This will give people the ability to exercise their rights and obligations, access and optimise the use of available resources, and strengthen local institutions' capability.

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