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Leadership Questions and Effective Trade Union Functions

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Abstract

Trade union is important to effective industrial relations in any economy. Organisations exist to create labour productivity and wealth in the economy but the sustenance of the objective in a competitive environment is moderated by the trade union and how its functions are managed by its leadership in a complex and competitive environment. Rather than harmonious relationships that should foster productivity, trade disputes and strikes have been commonplace with consequences on the economy. The Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC), Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), NASU, and Nigerian Medical Association (NMA) and others have been involved in prolonged industrial disputes with their employers and the government at various times in the last two years. The incessant industrial disputes have shifted attention of scholars and other stakeholders to the functions of the trade union, particularly the capacity of its leadership to effectively manage the activities of the trade union and redirect the union to the path of value creation and functional relationship with the employers and government. This paper will focus on questions that workers ask in the workplace about their career and future as it relates to their associations and the meaning they derive from the response they get from leadership.

Keywords: Leadership, Trade unions, Labour Union, Employers' Associations, Functions

Introduction

The employer, employees, and government are the tripartite parties in industrial relations and the role of the trade union as an essential part of the tripod cannot be overemphasized (Abubakar and Samuel, 2017; Anyim and Okeke, 2019). Recent developments in Nigeria show that the practice of industrial relations in the public sector has not been optimal and trade unions in respective sectors such as education, health care, electricity, have been in the eye of the storm with its leaders working hard to maintain its credibility before its members and counterparties such as the employers, government, and the public (Gbenga-Ogundare, 2022). Industrial dispute is inevitable in relationship but Obi-Ochiabutor (2002-2010) posited that its effective management is critical to organisational and national survival. The leadership of the trade union is at the centre of industrial harmony or disputes, depending on how it navigates the union through the process of engagement to pursue their rights, and exercise of rights when relationship breaks down with the other parties in the employment triangle.

These are uncertain times in the workplace all over the world when workers are asking questions pertinent to their welfare. Anyim, Ilesanmi and Alaribe (2013) are of the view that trade unions should protect their members against exploitations, either in the organisation or society but the environment moderates the functions of trade union as some are more prominent than the other depending on the times and factors in its internal and external environment (Ewing, 2008). The functions of the trade union in the organisation is situational.

Workers have always looked up to leaders to navigate their team through the perils of the environment in VUCA world. When the times are volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous, workers ask questions, pertinent questions that eventually become leadership questions. These questions arise from the sanctuary of their existential existence. They want to know purpose. The purpose of their existence the purpose of the career, the purpose of their association, and the future of their choice.

Fajana (2005) that there was a time in the history of trade union in Nigeria that there was a speculation that the movement could metamorphosize into a political party to cater to the interests of labour but concluded that the expectation did not materialise because workers in the country are known to be loyal to their ethnic and communal affiliations. The Labour Party which exists today is one of the political parties in Nigeria which was created as Party for Social Democracy in 2002 and changed its name to Labour Party after the 2003 General Election. Except in name "Labour", the political party has no affiliation to the labour movement in Nigeria.

In Nigeria, the labour movement has metamorphosed into an opposition force that represent the aspirations of the citizenry to the government for good governance, social-economic development, and social welfare of the masses. Anyim, Ilesanmi, and Alaribe (2013) stated that the roles of trade unions have transcended the threshold of the protection of the rights of its members against obnoxious labour practices in the organisations to the protection of the working class against exploitations in the society. This is what the Nigeria Labour Congress has more or less done whether there is military or civilian government in power in the country since independence. Scholars think that the labour unions have not fared well in this expanded role and question the leadership for the failure.

The effectiveness or otherwise of the role and relevance of the labour union in recent times, particularly in a period of recession has raised the question of competence of labour union leadership in Nigeria. Organisations need industrial harmony to perform and thrive in a complex and competitive environment. It is the labour union that holds the ace as a mediating group in the mix to promote harmonious relationship between the employer and employees. Is the trade union performing its functions as expected? Why are there so many industrial disputes in recent times across the sectors of the economy? Is it an internal or external problem? The rule of self-examination will apply here. Is the leadership faithful to the functions of trade union? This paper will discuss the functions of trade union and examine the leadership question in the power dynamics in industrial relations to make the trade union effective in the discharge of its functions.

Conceptual Clarifications

Trade Union: The Trade Unions Act (2005) defined the Trade Union as the *combination of workers or employers, whether temporary or permanent, the purpose of which is to regulate the terms and conditions of employment of workers, whether the combination in question would or would not, apart from this Act, be an unlawful combination by reason of any of its purpose being in restraint of trade, and whether its purposes do or do not include the provision of benefits for its members.* Okolie (2010) cited Fajana and stated that trade unions laws in Nigeria recognise the unions of employers' associations and labour unions formed for securing certain socio-economic benefits to members. The Trade Union is the association of the two independent parties involved in interdependent employment relationship in the organisation as recognised by extant Nigerian Laws. The parties are the employers and their workers that form different associations of employers of labour and workers who provide labour for the employer, commonly referred to as labour union. There are the employers' associations and in Nigeria, these are the Nigeria Employers' Consultative Association (NECA), the Manufacturers' Association of Nigeria (MAN), and the Nigeria Association of Chambers of Commerce, Industry, Mines, and Agriculture (NACCIMA). There is also workers association and these different unions are subsumed under the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) and the Trade Union Congress (TUC).

The term “trade union” has been used interchangeably with “labour union”. The Encyclopedia Britannica (2022) referred to the trade union as labour union and submitted that it is an association of workers in a particular industry established to seek better conditions of service for its members through collective bargaining. Adefolaju (2013) and Okafor and Malizu (2013) stated that trade unions are organised groupings of workers that relate with employers on the wellbeing of their members. But, Obiekwe and Obibhunun (2019) said that labour union is an association of workers that interface with the employer on behalf of their members for employee welfare and better workplace conditions. Although the commonly held consideration for the definition of trade union is the association of workers, the statutory definition includes both the workers and employers, and the associations they form to relate with each other as the two main parties to employment contract and relationship in the workplace. The assumption that trade union is used interchangeably with labour union is not unusual because the history of industrial relations began with the emergence of labour associations and this preceded the establishment of laws that recognised and regulated their activities. The first trade union in Nigeria was the Southern Nigerian Civil Service Union and it was birthed out of labour movement in 1912 prior to the promulgation of the Trade Union Ordinance No. 44 of 1938 as the first trade union statute in Nigeria (Kenen, 2020). There were the Railway Workers Union and Nigeria Union of Teachers in 1931 and these labour unions were organised and sustained by the trade unionism phenomenon through the volunteerism of their members and leadership which laid the foundation for industrial relations practice seven years before the first trade union statute was promulgated to standardise the environment.

In Nigeria, trade unions emerged from labour unionism and government’s intervention through laws and regulations to create an environment for effective industrial relations in the economy. The role of government from the colonial administration through the military regime to the present-day democratic dispensation is to create an environment where the employers and workers are involved in employment relationship that promote harmonious industrial coexistence for economic growth (Akinyooye and Fajimi, 2022). The workers wanted an avenue to assert their rights to demand for fair wages and welfare and employers wanted productivity and organisational competitiveness but the government whose responsibility is to create social regulation and prosperity in the society has the instrument of the state to establish necessary laws and regulations to moderate the aspirations of both parties to achieve its pursuit of an orderly and prosperous society (Fajimi and Momoh, 2021).

Leadership: It is a truism to state that leadership is at the heart of the protection and promotion of the principle of the freedom of association that guarantees the existence, operationality, and sustainability of trade unions for social justice and economic prosperity in the society. Kester and Shadare (2011) stated unequivocally that leadership is fundamental to the success of any organisation and the crux of the challenges facing trade union movement in Nigeria in contemporary times is leadership.

Tamunomiebi and Abraham (2019) identified leadership as the critical factor responsible for the growth, strength, and effectiveness of trade unions. In the trade unionism, groups associate with the intention to be guided and follow through the protection and defense of their occupational interests under a convergence of democratically elected representatives, who in turn constitute the leadership of the unions. The leadership of these trade unions is responsible for the management of their operations and collective bargaining as the environment begins to respond to the challenges of globalisation, liberalisation, and digitisation that seek to redefine workplace engagement and industrial relations (Moris, 2002).

Knowles (2007) was concerned that as important as leadership is in the survival and sustenance of trade unions, the subject of leadership of trade unions has remained a neglected aspect in the field of contemporary leadership studies among scholars. Trade unions in industrial setting from the context of work and organisation consists of two categories of people: the leaders and followers, and the success of any organisation is predicated on the effectiveness of leaders in guiding the actions of followers towards the attainment of objectives of the dyadic relationship (Tinuoye, Adamade, and Oggaranduku, 2022). The understanding of leadership within the context of work has changed significantly since the industrial revolution and leadership in organisations focuses on managerial leadership and leadership behaviour since the 1950s. The emphasis of leadership in the management of institutionalised relationship and bureaucratic work environment has been to balance the force of performance in the dyadic relationships between leaders and followers. As a result, Yukl (2013) turned the attention of leadership in organisation to approaches that reinforces the dyad based on trait, behaviour, power-influence, situational and integrative theories which conceptualised leadership as intra-individual, dyadic, group, and organisational processes.

Therefore, leadership is defined in terms of traits, behaviours, influence, interaction patterns, role relationships, and occupation of an administrative position, according to Yukl (2013). Leadership is the inflexion point that changes the behaviours of followers in the organisation to adjust their attitude individually and collectively toward doing what they need, should, and want to, and must do in the pursuit of their stated objectives (Olaleye and Fajimi, 2020). In addition to the traditional leadership theories and styles of *autocratic leadership*, *democratic leadership*, *bureaucratic leadership*, and *laissez-faire leadership* that have emerged from the First Industrial Revolution as postulated by the psychologist, Kurt Lewin in 1939 to the Fourth Industrial Revolution, there are contemporary theoretical framework of leadership in organisation and these are *situational leadership*, *charismatic leadership*, *transformational leadership*, and *transactional leadership* which influence trade union functions in industrial relations.

The different theories of leadership in organisation from traditional to contemporary affect the trade union and its functionality in different ways. The first traditional leadership theory is autocratic

leadership which is also known as authoritarian leadership and characterised by absolute control of the organisation by the leaders who centralize authority and limit followers' participation in decision making. The democratic leadership is participative where leaders create a culture of employee participation to engender shared experiences for delegated authority, decision making, and productivity. The bureaucratic leadership governs the workplace through a rigid hierarchical structure and high degree of formality with limited opportunity for the use of initiatives in execution of work for followers. The fourth traditional leadership is laissez-faire or delegative leadership where followers are given a free rein to do what they like as leaders "hands off" with passivity. For contemporary leadership theories, situational leadership is adaptive where leaders respond to the needs of the followers with flexibility based on their capabilities and environment. Charismatic leaders exhibits a level of competence, confidence, and strong personality to motivate their followers to commit themselves to the pursuit of ideological goals. Charismatic leaders inspire followers' obedience, affection, admiration, and 'personality cult' following. On its part, transformational leaders inspire their followers to commit themselves to follow and change organisational processes in the attainment of the goals of the organisation. Transactional leaders situate the attainment of goals by followers within the status quo of the organisation by ensuring that the followers understand the processes and procedures for group's goal achievement and follow the rules of engagement in doing so.

Functions of Trade Unions

Okafor and Malizu (2013) said that workers join association in a quest for enhancement in working conditions, better wages and other material remuneration, job security, working hours and respect and dignity. Okolie (2010) posited that the functions of trade unions to their members entail economic, social, welfare, political, psychological benefits and opportunity to participate in managerial functions in the industry. Generally, Sharma (2020) classified the functions of trade unions into fraternal functions (brother relationship) and militant functions (activist or revolutionary). The fraternal functions of trade unions (either employers' associations or labour union) involve the promotion of members' welfare, promotion of members' self-efficacy, encouragement of discipline and professionalism among members, provision of opportunities for self-development and growth, and protection of women members against discrimination at work. The militant functions of trade unions on the part of the employer association include attainment of production targets and frustration of industrial actions that can hamper productivity whilst the labour unions want to achieve fair (or at times, higher) wages and better working conditions, raise in the status of workers as a significant part of the industry, and protect their workers against victimization and injustice.

Specifically, the leadership of trade unions is primarily involved in the regulation of terms and conditions of employment of workers, institution of governance and democracy of management, and collective bargaining toward the protection of the interests of their members against unfair labour

practices. These fundamental roles are enshrined in the principles of freedom of associations and guaranteed in the rights of both the employers' associations and labour union to associate freely in the organisation. It is not only the labour union that has the duty of care to protect its members against unfair labour practices. The employers too can guard their members against arbitrary industrial action against their organisations by labour unions.

Regulation of terms and conditions of workers. Tamunomiebi and Abraham (2019) argued that the function of union leadership in a unionized environment is the quality and adequacy of employees' welfare. It, therefore, means that workplace problems of inequitable remuneration, poor working conditions, lack of discipline, lack of or absence of personnel policies, inadequate welfare, poor employer-employee relation and inability to safeguard organisational health are not the sole fault of labour union leadership as it is generally believed in the community of practice. Where the union leadership is ineffective on the part of both the employers' associations and labour union, there is prevalence of poor condition of service in the organisation. It is the responsibility of trade union leadership to regulate the terms and conditions of workers by providing enabling working environment where labour is appreciated and valued for their contributions to the attainment of the goals of the organisation. Trade union leadership should ensure that wages and salaries of their workforce is competitive in the industry to attract quality workforce and engender employee participation and retention. Again, trade union leadership should implement contemporary personnel policies that align with the minimum threshold of the Labour Law and other International Labour Organisation's convention for workplace health, safety, and productivity to enhance employee welfare, workplace discipline, and effective employee-employer relations.

Governance and democracy in management. The union leadership is concerned with the management of the workplace and production efficiency on the parts of both the employers' associations and labour unions that it institutes corporate governance and internal mechanism for institutional democracy in management. Irrespective of the styles of leadership prevalent in the organisation at any time, unless there is governance and internal democracy in management, there is bound to be industrial dispute which will threaten harmony and collective bargaining. Trade union leadership should be able to organise itself, its work environment and operations to earn the trust and confidence of members across the trade unions in the organisation. Interests of trade unions can move in different directions unless there is governance and internal democracy in the organisation. Chen (2022) defined corporate governance as the system of rules, practices, and processes through which organisation directs and controls its business operations by balancing the interests of its many stakeholders such as the employers' associations, labour union, government, customers, bankers, and the community. The Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales (2022) surmised that the purpose of corporate governance in the organisation is to facilitate effective, entrepreneurial, and prudent management that

enables the organisation achieve its long-term objectives and remain competitive. Adesina and Adegbosin (2019) explained that good corporate governance is built on sound internal democracy, enterprise risk management, effective regulatory environment, accountability, transparency, and adequate disclosure requirement. There is the Code of Corporate Governance published in Nigeria by the Federal Reporting Council in 2018 to regulate governance and internal democracy in organisations according to the Financial Reporting Council of Nigeria Act 2011. It should also be noted that the basis for the consolidation of labour unions and formation of the Nigerian Labour Congress was to promote internal democracy devoid of limited government intervention in trade union matters (Nwoko, 2009).

Provision of economic benefits to members. This is the nucleus of the functions of union leadership in industrial relations (Okolie, 2010). The regulation of terms and conditions of workers in labour unions and governance for employers' associations is to ensure that members access and enjoy economic benefits from participating in the employment relationship in industrial relations. Employers' associations in Nigeria want to safeguard organisational health and interest of the industry (Sharma, 2020). Trade unions on their part exist primarily for the betterment of their members (Okafor and Malizu, 2013). Both parties pursue betterment of relationships moderated by appropriate laws of the government and seek platforms for self-expression in their relationships. It is, therefore, understandable that workers join labour unions for opportunities to minimise discrimination and achieve greater bargaining power than they will achieve if they engage the employers individually. Also, workers join labour unions for a sense of belongingness, participation in decision-making as it affects their welfare and career, and security on the job.

Collective bargaining. Fajimi and Momoh (2021) said collective bargaining is the function of trade union leadership and prevents industrial dispute between the employer and labour union when it is effective in the organisation. Employer-employee relationship in the organisation is an institutionalised relationship and it is guided by collective bargaining process which is protected by national laws and international conventions to protect the interests of both parties in the collective bargaining agreement to enhance industrial harmony in the economy. It is the responsibility of union leadership to create an environment for genuine dialogue between employers' associations and labour unions so that both parties will understand each other's problems, frustrations, and demands with a view to finding creative and cost-effective way to resolve them. Collective bargaining is the tool for constructive dialogue between employers' associations and labour unions. An effective trade union leadership will actively promote constructive rather than confrontational dialogue and direct its resources to building its organisation in an increasingly competitive environment. The competition in the marketplace is tough in contemporary times and trade union leadership seeks participatory engagement and constructive dialogue between the employer and labour union to avoid disruption in operation. Collective bargaining thrives where trade union leadership respects the right of workers to join and belong to the labour union,

and participate in its leadership without fear of intimidation or loss of job. The leadership should also ensure that the environment is free from discriminatory policies and practices and provide workers' representatives with facilities to enhance the development of effective collective agreement.

Challenges of Leadership in Trade Union Effectiveness in Nigeria

Industrial disputes ensue when the functions of trade unions in the organisation go off at a tangent and degenerate into industrial crises precipitated by strike actions or lock out primarily because of ineffective collective bargaining and failure of trade union leadership. When the objective of the trade union to get maximum benefits for its members is at cross purpose with the goal of employer's association to increase productivity and maximise profitability in the organisation, industrial dispute may occur that task the ability of trade unions' leadership on both side of the divide, and drag in government agencies into the problem such that the state is unable to achieve social benefits of national productivity, human capital development and social justice. The Nigerian labour ecosystem has been riddled with incessant industrial disputes, particularly in recent times that attention has been shifted to the challenges of leadership in the effectiveness of trade unions and industrial relations practice in Nigeria.

Wokoma (2011) surmised that the industrial sector in Nigeria has been riddled with chaos and crises from the first industrial action in 1945 when 43,000 workers went on strike for 40 days to contemporary times as a result of industrial conflicts and strikes. Awe and Ayeni (2010) in Wokoma (2011) studied the history of strikes in Nigeria from 1990 to 2006 recorded the instances of trade disputes and resultant work stoppages and man-hour loss during the period in Table 1:

Table 1: Industrial Disputes in Nigeria (1990 – 2006)

Year	Trade Dispute	Work Stoppages	Man-hour Loss	Workers Involved
2006	46	112	86,342	2,446,055
2005	155	489	872,463	2,086,903
2004	152	152	517,331	3,302,112
2003	149	669	162,199	4,518,321
2002	50	42	302,006	5,505,322
2001	51	37	259,290	4,722,910
2000	49	47	344,722	6,287,733
1999	52	27	173,858	3,158,087
1998	16	11	9,494	47,631
1997	31	31	59,897	359,801
1996	29	24	19,826	94,664
1995	46	26	193,944	2,269,037
1994	199	110	1,541,146	234,307,748
1993	160	90	880,224	6,192,167
1992	221	124	238,324	966,611
1991	204	117	460,471	2,257,382
1990	174	102	254,540	1,339,105

Source: Awe and Ayeni (2010) in Wokoma (2011)

All members of the labour unions across all the sectors of the economy individually or under the auspices of the Nigerian Labour Congress have been involved in industrial disputes with their employers or government at one time or the other. Between 2006 to 2020, several labour unions such as Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), Academic Staff Union of Polytechnics (ASUP), Joint Health Sector Union (JOHESU), and the Nigerian Labour Congress have embarked on industrial strike actions in different sectors. In 2021, there were 103 labour complaints and trade disputes with 14 industrial strike actions in Nigeria according to records from the Federal Ministry of Labour and Productivity with 74% of these disputes in the public sector and 25% from the private sector (Peterside, 2021). Some labour unions such as the National Union of Electricity Employees, Non-Academic Staff Union of Universities and Allied Institutions (NASU), Senior Staff Union of Nigerian Universities (SSANU), and Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) have either gone on industrial actions or threatened industrial actions in 2022 with ASUU's being the most prolonged. Akinbode (2019) stated that the government white paper to stem industrial disputes through the "No Work, No Pay" clause has not succeeded in resolving the increasing industrial strike actions in the country. Against this background, Kester and Shadare (2011) reviewed trends in challenges of trade unions effectiveness in Nigeria and concluded that the major problem trade union movement faces in Nigeria from inception to date is the problem of leadership. Suffice to say that industrial disputes and inefficient collective bargaining in trade unions are traceable to the problem of leadership.

Employers' Associations: Spooner (n.d.) said that employers' associations emerged in Australia in response to threats that labour unions and state intervention seemingly posed to employers that formed their associations whose activities involve the participation in the determination of employment conditions on behalf of their members. In Nigeria, employers' associations are pro-government and less interested in labour activism against the government or its policies (George, Owoyemi, and Onokala, 2012). In relations to the labour union, however, the employers' associations are fond of arbitrariness, inhumanity, inflexibility, and authoritarianism (Tamunomiebi and Abraham, 2019). Ajewole (2014) and Akinbode and Ebeloku (2017) in Akinbode (2019) claimed that industrial disputes that are traceable to employers' associations include harassment of union officials and workers, unfavourable working environment, inequitable remuneration, unfair labour practice, casualisation of labour, breach of collective bargaining agreement, and wrongful termination. The employers' associations, sometimes, refuse to negotiate with labour union leaders because of the colonial mentality that labour union leaders and not equal but subservient to the management of the organisation that are representatives of the employers' association. Akinbode (2019) listed the cost of employers' associations' ineffective industrial relations and bad union leadership to the organisations as loss of production, loss of customers, brand management crises and potential institutional reputation loss, and labour crises such as high employee turnover, high recruitment cost, and high training and manpower cost.

Labour Unions: Ngwama (2016) claimed that the labour union is the most influential non-state actor in Nigeria and suggested that it should continue to sustain its capacity to articulate and defend national interests against reactionary forces. The leadership of the trade union has gone on industrial action at one time or the other for greater good of the society, an elastic function beyond the core of their association such as funding of the public universities in the education sector by ASUU, reduction of pump price of premium motor spirits (petrol) to cushion its effect on the Nigerian populace by the NLC, and the agitations for upward review of minimum wage by the Organised Labour Unions (Akinbode, 2019). This has been the bane of effective trade union functions and ineffectiveness of union leadership because whilst it this aspiration of the labour union is altruistic, it is clearly a stretch and beyond the predefined statutory functions of trade union in Nigeria. Aside from stretching its core functions, the labour union leadership is plagued with internal crisis of legitimacy, corruption, incompetence, and lack of innovativeness to explore modern industrial relations practices to engage employers. There has been a paradigm shift, and the perception of labour union leaders as opposition or adversary to management does not fit the dynamism of doing business in the Fourth Industrial Revolution where there is the conflict of individualism and unionism in the workplace because of modern human resources management practice, and market competitiveness facing organisations. Akinbode (2019) attributed the costs of ineffective labour union and poor leadership to loss of credibility, loss of prestige, job insecurity, loss of remuneration, and failure of organisations.

Government: Akinyooye and Fajimi (2022) posited that government's involvement in industrial relations has been statutory and interventionist in nature which have either turned out to be positive or counterproductive to the labour union movement depending on the era and type of government in place. The military government enacted various ordinances and decrees to regulate labour relations practice in the country, and this initiative has streamlined the operations of labour union and created employers' association. However, the government has interfered and manipulated the labour union leadership whenever they confronted undemocratic policies against the populace. This interference has resulted in the dissolution of labour union groups and earned many labour leaders unlawful imprisonment and jail terms for their participation in protests against the government. The civilian government exemplified democratic ethos and improved on industrial relations practice by expanding the role of government participation through legislative and judiciary mechanism, particularly with the expansion of the functions of the National Industrial Court under the Trade Dispute Act. However, the functionaries of government have acted as interested parties in industrial disputes thereby exhibiting lack of depth of knowledge and incompetence in industrial relations practice leading to impasse in industrial strike actions among labour union leadership and the government.

Some of the challenges can be summarized as juicy political appointments to leaders, inordinate ambition for power and material things, clique among the leaders, lack of bargaining skills, abuse of

executive power of government over the other two arms of industrial actors among others. All these have been militating against the effectiveness of labour union leaders.

Union Leadership Roles toward Effective Trade Union

The questions that this paper seeks to answer in the light of the challenges faced with union leadership in achieving trade union effectiveness in Nigeria are: What should trade union leadership be doing? Trade union leadership should be proactive and focus on these integrated roles arising from the philosophy of constructive engagement, negotiation, and dialogue between the trade unions in the organisation rather than confrontational or passive aggressive approach to industrial conflicts to promote social justice for key stakeholders in the industrial relations ecosystem in an increasingly competitive environment:

1. **Market Role.** Organisations are market-facing as the world become more competitive because of market deregulation, liberalisation, globalisation, and technology. Recession and its resultant inflation in the economy shrink market shares of organisations and complicate scarce resources. Union leadership should close ranks rather than confront each other to update their human resources policies and procedures to protect workers' right to work and uphold fair labour practices while providing support to the macro and micro economic policies of the organisation to enhance best practice in human resources management, employee productivity, and organisational profitability. Trade unions must practice strategy management that enables the organisation navigates the competitive environment and at the same time compassionate human resources management that protects and sustains employee welfare and productivity.
2. **Service Role.** Trade union leadership should offer value that will give their members a sense of belongingness. Employers' associations are ahead of trade unions in this regard. Members want to get benefits for making financial contributions to their associations. Therefore, trade unions should rethink its approach to welfarism of their members and not insist that it is only the employers that should be concerned about employees welfare. On their part, trade union leadership can develop and set up various schemes and facilities and improve ease of access to these schemes and facilities such as home ownership through the Federal Mortgage Bank of Nigeria, car loans, investment schemes, mortgages, insurance policies, medical facilities, travel and recreational facilities at discount rates, educational scholarship for members and their children, entrepreneurship training and loans for small businesses for members' spouses, business advisory services within the rank of the trade unions to members' spouses in entrepreneurship, and legal representations for members and their families. These services will make members become active participants in union activities and improve employer-employee relations when issues of welfare are no longer the basis for industrial actions.

3. **Regulatory Role.** Rather than leave the initiatives to employers' associations to interface with regulatory agencies during evaluation of compliance with standards in health and safety, and remittance of statutory returns such as PAYE and employee pension, labour union leadership should have a representation in the process. This will ensure that organisations are compliance and respect the rights of workers to the remittance of PAYE and pension that have been deducted from their monthly salaries. This will engender accountability, transparency, integrity, and trust between labour unions and management in the organisation. The labour unions' leadership should also be actively involved in the design or review of policies and procedures relating to staff discipline, work processes and procedures, health, safety and environment, and collective bargaining agreement. By so doing, the labour unions in the organisation will take ownership of the process and not feign ignorance of the provisions of the internal laws and regulations when it is time for implementation for erring worker.
4. **Governance & Democratisation Role.** In contemporary times, organisations thrive through corporate governance and participatory democracy. On their parts, trade unions should promote governance and internal democracy in the management of their unions' operations. This action will encourage workers' participation in union activities. Also, trade unions leadership should collectively enhance corporate governance and internal democracy in the organisation. It should be the commitment of both unions and management should actively involve employee participation through labour union to foster confidence and trust in leadership. This role will improve communication, decision-making and social exchange in the organisation irrespective of the leadership styles and prevalent organisational culture.
5. **Human Capital Development Role.** The priority of union leadership is the capacity development of their human capital. There is talent scarcity in the labour market and employees remain the most important resource in the employment value chain that cannot be replicated or clone by competitors in the market. Both unions must agree on the best framework to attract, hire, and retain their workforce through good human resources management strategy and equitable remuneration. When this is in place, agitation for better conditions of service will lower and the organisation will be able to concentrate on human capital development of their members individually and collectively.
6. **Political Role.** Trade unions are neither political oppositions in the organisation nor political agitators against government but they have power and social capital that can influence political decisions. Union leadership should understand the linkages between trade union movement and political parties to the government in power, and remain guide their unions to be politically neutrally at all times. They should avoid any confrontations with the government that can disrupt the economy because this has been counterproductive. Rather, they should engage the government

through high-powered lobby and representation in legislation to pass favourable prosocial bills and laws for the prosperity of the country. Trade union leadership should ensure that their internal processes and governance are above board and comply with best practices before they engage the government. Present-day trade union leadership should shed the toga of liberation fighters and function as institutional thought leaders with the ability to impact the business of governance through innovation and transformational leadership.

7. **Welfare Role.** Trade unions leadership should extend welfare services to members' families and communities in the society as a part of their corporate social responsibility. Rather than confront government or instigate social unrest in the society, there are innovative ways to endear the trade unions to the hearts of the people through corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities to offer family services and education programmes to the society. These services could include practice of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in organisation policies, provision of employment to people with disabilities and making the workplace friendly to support disability, provision of creches, day care centres, old people's homes and recreational or sports centres for youth in the community. This initiative will assist the government to cushion the effect of governance and increase social services to places where government cannot reach.
8. **Advisory Role.** Members of the trade unions face personal and group problems that create work-family conflicts interfering with their effectiveness and productivity. If these problems persist, they create toxicity around the workers that have multiplier effects on people and activities around them thereby rendering them unproductive and passive-aggressive. Trade union leadership should set up advisory services for their members to cater to their mental health and wellness programmes. The leadership should encourage their members to also use the employee assistance programmes (EAPs) of the organisation for their wellness. This will reduce incidences of fatigue, burnout, depression, suicide, and untimely death among members of the unions.
9. **Growth Role.** Organisations exist in the market to maximise profits and workers want opportunities to grow their career and protect their right to work and better conditions of services. Union leadership should focus their attention on short, medium, and long term to this role so that both the workers and organisations will achieve their aspirations through the employment relationships. The more trade unions leadership build competencies to engender growth in their organisations, the better relationship and harmonious industrial relations they will achieve in the society.

Way Forward

The roles of leadership in building a viable trade union in Nigeria are enormous but they can be become a reality with the following suggestions.

- Trade unions should embrace change and reinvent to improve its engagement, negotiation, and dialogue strategy with each other, and the government so that they will practice industrial relations that reflect the realities of the Fourth Industrial Revolution.
- Trade unions should create, through their leaders, an enabling environment where members have the right work climate, organisational culture, policies, and processes to exercise to right to work, right to associate, and right to grow their career and business objectives without intimidation, fears, or threats.
- Trade unions should promote governance and internal democracy to show competence and integrity and earn the trust and confidence of their members.
- Trade unions should invest heavily in Industrial Education, which is why Adult Education is important in the whole mix as a field of study to enhance the quality of trade union effectiveness and leadership performance in trade union organisations in Nigeria. Trade union leadership cannot perform their roles mentioned in this paper without an intentional strategy of industrial education. There must be a deliberate attempt to budget for and implement board membership education and training, staff training and capacity development, women education, and empowerment training in softs skills to prepare workers for managerial and administrative roles in governance and internal democratic processes of both the unions and organisations.
- Collective bargaining should be pivotal to industrial relations practice in the organisations and trade union leadership should uphold the tenets of co-operative negotiations and dialogue in conflict resolutions rather than confrontational approach that disrupt service.
- Trade unions leadership should promote the use of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) techniques to resolve industrial actions because it is cost-effective and better than confrontation against the other party or government.
- Trade union leadership should be guided by the respect and observance of the rule of law and insist that their members also exhibit this quality of character even in the face of institutional provocation. They should train their members to always seek legal advice and redress on all issues of labour disputes.

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