



# **Rhetoric in Communication: A Tool for Collective Bargaining and Industrial Harmony**

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## **Authors' contributions**

*This work was carried out in collaboration between both authors. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.*

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## **ABSTRACT**

This article examined rhetoric in communication as a tool for collective bargaining and industrial harmony. Factually, industrial crises, disagreement and consequential disharmony seem to have, over some reckoned time, characterized the industrial system. This syndrome has, in a significant way, affected not only the relationship between employers and employees but also the productivity of the staffers. Enviably profit-making and productivity is the utmost objective of any given institution, company and other establishments, be it the private or public sector. But the primary essence of the existence of such an establishment is often thwarted by industrial disharmony. The objective of this research is to investigate the role of rhetoric in collective bargaining and industrial harmony. The aims were to establish the integral bond among rhetoric, collective bargaining and industrial harmony, examine the important role of good oratorical habit in resolving industrial disharmony, and the import of the achieved harmony in an organization's productivity. The research was anchored on the three theories of rhetoric: Ethos (which appeal to authority), Pathos, (which appeal to emotions) and Logos (which appeal to reason, logic, and the word) and the Behavioural Management theory.

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While Rhetorical theory takes care of the ethics of respect for all parties, their emotions and qualitative logical arguments, the Behavioural Management theory emphasizes the vitality of social interactions and employee satisfaction in the workplace for optimal achievement of the organization's goals. Recommendations were made among which are the adoption of a dynamic approach and the maintenance of good communication system in the course of collective bargaining for sustainable communication and desired productivity.

*Keywords: Rhetoric; communication; collective bargaining; industrial harmony; productivity.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Human society does not exist in a vacuum. It is characterized by institutions, establishments and production outfits that engage persons in the production processes. There exists, therefore, the phenomenon of employer and employee in institutions and establishments, be it private or public sector. So long as there is the phenomenal reality of employer and employee, the principles and terms of engagement become paramount while the need for collective bargaining and industrial harmony become integrally immanent. Sometimes, current economic, social or other realities may necessitate an upward review of working conditions. Oftentimes, however, industrial disputes arise (like the case of the Federal Government of Nigeria and the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) or the Academic Staff Union of Polytechnics (ASUP)) when a party, "especially an employer, fails to honour existing agreements or see the rationale to review them in tune with current realities" [1].

As has been attested to by Ekwoba, Ide and Ojikutu [2], collective bargaining and industrial harmony are essentially the sustaining potent pillars of any given establishment and its eventual enduring productivity. Thus, the major concern of any responsible government, employer of labour, investor and trade union of any industrial community should be the maintenance of healthy industrial relation and harmony. This is paramount because industrial conflict disrupts both the process of productivity and the free flow of goods and services. Globally, in both unionized and non-unionized establishments, the most common subjects which come within consultation are working conditions, working hours, leave, safety and health, welfare and cultural activities, bonus, pension and retirement benefits, working scheduling, education and training, recruitment, transfer, lay-off and job assignment. All these subjects periodically call for review through collective bargaining, not unilateral decisions.

The success of collective bargaining and subsequent good industrial relation and harmony hinges on the toolery of rhetoric in communication. This paper, therefore, seeks to x-ray the ennobling roles that rhetoric plays in ensuring the effective resolution of industrial disharmony.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

This paper adopted qualitative research method. This approach helps to explain what parties should do and the rhetorical skills required to resolve industrial disputes. Thus, the concepts of rhetoric, communication, collective bargaining and industrial harmony are elucidated and the integrality among them is established.

### 2.1 Conceptual Elucidation

Rhetoric, communication, collective bargaining and industrial harmony are important operational concepts in this research. They require some degree of elucidation for the purpose of enhancing our argument and that of the readers' comprehension.

### 2.2 Rhetoric

Rhetoric is an age-long concept, often referred to as "a counterpart of both logic and politics" [3]. Rhetoric actually emerged as a crucial tool to influence politics and genuine arguments. Throughout European history to contemporary time, rhetoric concerned itself with persuasion in public and political settings such as assemblies and courts. Its association with democratic institutions informs its conceptual definitions. Aristotle, the father of rhetoric, conceptualized rhetoric as "the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion" [4]. Rhetoric characteristically, seeks to identify the appropriate means of persuasion in a given situation, in this case, collective bargaining. Ashipu [5] defines rhetoric as "the persuasive means of communication, which focuses on ways of bringing about a change in the thinking

of the listener as desired by the persuader". In a clearer perspective, Brembeck and Hewel [6] conceive rhetoric as "a conscious attempt to modify the thoughts and actions by manipulating the motive of the audience (or listener) towards a predetermined end". The predetermined end is either the will of the employer or that of the employees. In most cases, the balance is struck between the industrial community of employees and employers.

Rhetoric is factually the study of effective speaking and writing, the exhibition of negotiating capacity and potentiality, and the art of persuasion where language and communication is at work orally and in writing. It concerns itself with what is being said for the attainment of industrial goals as well as the method and means of saying them. Rhetoric dwells on putting together qualitative arguments, communication for the means of persuasion, mastering different types of appeals, crafting those appeals and making them situation-specific and audience-tailored. The implementation is much more realized in industrial dialogue.

Having rhetorical skills means being aware of and appropriating five canons of rhetoric. The five canons are "invention (the process of developing arguments); style (determining how to present the argument); arrangement (organizing the argument for extreme effect); delivery (the gestures, pronunciation, tone and pace used when presenting persuasive messages); and memory (the process of learning and memorizing the speech and persuasive messages)" [7]. In addition to the above is the effective application of the three dimensions of rhetoric: *logos*, *ethos* and *pathos*. These respectively involve "the ability of the speaker to provide truth using rational arguments; ability to portray himself as being creditable and trustworthy and the power of evoking emotions of the audience" [3].

### 3. COMMUNICATION

Communication as a concept has to do with "exchange of information between two or more people" (Ogundipe, 1994:1). Within the scope of our research, communication is seen as

The process and (or) *act of using words*, ... to express or exchange information, ideas, thoughts, feelings, beliefs, idiosyncrasies and other needs to someone else for the purpose of the association, the *impartation of knowledge* or relationship (emphasis, ours) [8].

Beyond the act of using words and impartation of knowledge, is the phenomenal and conscious manipulation of language to achieve industrial equilibrium and resolution of industrial crises. The resolved dispute brings about communal well-being, a serene atmosphere and resultant increased productivity. Thus, communication connotes a social process of reaching mutual understanding in which participants do not only exchange (encode-decode) information and ideas but more essentially create and share meaning during negotiation and collective bargaining. In essence, communication is vital to any social and industrial system as it creates an enabling environment of trust, harmony and proficiency. It is perhaps in light of the above that Unachukwu [9] posits that "effective communication facilitates meaningful interaction".

### 4. COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Collective bargaining is a compound concept. Collective as an adjective expresses a collection or aggregate of individuals. Bargaining is a verb that denotes making a bargain, to make a contract for the exchange of services. It is synonymous with *negotiation*. Collective bargaining, therefore, connotes a process where individuals or groups of persons are involved in negotiation. As a compound concept, collective bargaining is a social construct that relates to industrial relations. By this relation, we see collective bargaining as a process in which union and company representatives meet to negotiate a new labour contract or resolve contending issues. It is a negotiation that concerns the terms of employment and conditions of work between the employer and the employees. The International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention of 1949 gives us a succinct definition of collective bargaining as:

Voluntary negotiation between employer or employers' organizations and workers' organizations with a view to regulating the terms and conditions of employment by collective agreement [10].

### 5. INDUSTRIAL HARMONY

Industrial Harmony is another compound concept that is vital to this research. "Industrial" is an adjective that specifies something relating to industry, notably manufacturing industry or establishments where services are rendered. Services rendered could be in manpower development or community development as seen

in tertiary or secondary institutions, churches, ministries, etc. The noun, "harmony", denotes agreement, accord or peace. "Industrial" is used to modify "harmony". Taken holistically, industrial harmony defines a situation where the employees and employers cooperate willingly for the company's commercial objectives or the institution's aspirations. Industrial harmony, in essence, codifies a good rapport, a relationship of mutual trust and respect that is needed to exist between employers of labour and the workers.

## **6. INTEGRALITY AMONG RHETORIC, COLLECTIVE BARGAINING AND INDUSTRIAL HARMONY**

The key concepts of this research - rhetoric, collective bargaining and industrial harmony - actually share an integral bond that guarantee substantial and significant output and productivity. Rhetoric is the oil that greases collective bargaining and industrial harmony. It produces soothing words and logical standard for argumentation and persuasion. The success of the negotiation, its positive outcome and subsequent potent industrial relations have a direct bearing on logic that proceeds from rhetoric. In fact, rhetoric deals with the techniques of delivering the message. Such techniques or basic principles of logical, ethical and emotional appeals guide systematic approach to negotiation by negotiating parties. Rhetoric comes in-between collective bargaining and industrial harmony to open the eyes of management to the stark reality of industrial relations aimed at creating enduring industrial peace. Collective bargaining, through rhetoric, produces suggestions and recommendations that compel the management to be alert to its functions of analyzing and coordinating various relationships at the workplace. The relationships are concerned with how employers and employees get on together, what difficulties arise between them and how many difficulties and conflicts are resolved. All these precede industrial harmony which, in turn, creates a high level of employee satisfaction.

Collective bargaining and industrial harmony "take place at both national, industrial and enterprise levels" [11], be it in the public or private sectors. In no country does it take place exclusively at one level only. This shows that industrial harmony cannot be divorced from collective bargaining. During collective bargaining, the areas of dispute would be narrowed, and both parties would likely share a

common view about the issues and even arrive at a basic agreement on them. The shared common view engenders industrial harmony. In essence, collective bargaining is the means through which information is shared, mutual understanding is promoted, participation in arriving at a decision is facilitated and working conditions are renegotiated. All these find completeness in rhetoric which brings out the negotiating strength and skills of the parties. In fact, skillful questions which is an aspect of rhetoric are an effective way of compelling the other party to justify its claims on the merits, and even shifting the other party to a different point of view. Indeed, rhetoric, collective bargaining and industrial harmony share a synchronistic bond.

## **7. RHETORIC AS A COMMUNICATION TOOL IN COLLECTIVE BARGAINING**

Rhetoric is an ointment that tends to heal the wound of industrial dispute and disharmony while collective bargaining is the fitting spanner that opens the window of industrial relation and harmony. Throughout European history, "rhetoric has concerned itself with persuasion in public and political settings such as assemblies and courts" [12]. As one of the liberal or civic arts, rhetoric has been referred to as a means for sharpening communication skills for public speaking [5]. Quite importantly, George [13] points out that "rhetoric has the power to shape communities, form character of citizens and greatly affect civic life". Rhetoric does not only affect civic life but also feature in the world of science. For instance, it goes beyond the practices of mere objective testing and reporting of knowledge. Scientists must persuade their audience to accept their findings by sufficiently demonstrating that their study or experiment was conducted reliably which resulted in sufficient evidence to support their claims and conclusions. In the same vein, rhetoric can play a significant role in collective bargaining. The vital role of rhetoric in collective bargaining is earlier observed by Burke [14] who asserts that "humans use rhetoric to resolve conflicts by identifying shared characteristics and interests in symbols"; we share his view.

More modern-day experts have continued to support the claim of rhetoric being used as a tool for conflict resolution which comes during collective bargaining. Hariman [15] states that "questions of freedom, equality and justice often are raised and addressed from performances ranging from debates to demonstration without

loss of moral content". Furthermore, White [16] argues that "rhetoric is capable not only of addressing issues of political interest but that it can influence culture as a whole". The "culture" referred to here is that of justice and fairness in treating workers or employees; that of tolerance in accepting the opinions of workers and being humane in conceding to their requests. It also connotes the tolerant disposition of workers in accepting the implementable offer of the employer. In fact, it is the culture of equilibrium during negotiation. Engaging in rhetoric, words of persuasion and identification can define industrial community and civic life. Kelly [17] in his submission contends:

Persuasion is an attempt to induce the individual to accept a new opinion which constitutes a learning experience.... That is to say that when presented with a question, the individual now thinks of and prefers the new answer suggested by the communication to *the old one* (emphasis, ours).

"The old one" could be the old wage or old working conditions that cannot be sustained in a given current economic challenges, perhaps posed by recession or inflation. The major effect of persuasive communication, that is, rhetoric, lies in stimulating the listener (the employer) to think both of his/her initial opinion and the opinion recommended by the speaker (negotiator for the workers).

The use of rhetoric as a tool for collective bargaining prompts the negotiator or bargainer to be aware that the listener or employer is not an imbecile who must accept everything he/she hears. The theory of argumentation in rhetoric (*logos*) suggests that the employer does not always wait for his/her worker to feed him/her with ideas that he/she is expected to accept as gospel truth. The employer also makes a conscious effort to push forward his/her own argument in order to persuade the workers. In this case, therefore, both the complainant (worker) and the respondent (employer) have to argue persuasively in their defenses until one is declared more persuasive and, therefore, the winner of the negotiation or reaching implementable equilibrium.

Rhetoric skills also prompt the bargainer to be proactive and organize his argument before it is presented in order to achieve the set objective. A good negotiator who seeks to persuade in an argument does not present his points in a

disorderly manner or present an indefinite number of points. In fact, "he requires an organization of selected arguments in an order that will give the greatest persuasive force" [5]. The negotiator is expected to study the problems raised by the scope of the workers' demand and arranges them in the order, perhaps chronologically, in which they will achieve for him/her purpose in the discourse. It is a fact that arguments do not have equal strengths; they do not create the same impact. Thus, the arguments selected must be considered relevant to the issue at stake. Weak arguments must be avoided through rhetoric because they may induce the belief that the bargainer has no better argument to support his/her claims and, therefore, may not achieve positive result.

We have stated above that at the center of all rhetorical communication is the message. Ashipu, [5] writes that "the stock-in-trade of an orator is the message". For the message to perform its desired function, it must appeal to the will, intellect and emotion of the employer. The manner in which the rhetorical message can achieve this desired function depends on the oratorical (rhetorical) skill of the bargainer, his/her approach and structural arrangement. Thus, rhetoric becomes a tool when the structure of the message is not rigid and stereotypical. It can rather be adjusted and readjusted to suit both the occasion, time and place of bargaining [18].

Rhetoric as a tool for collective bargaining also involves the appropriation of style, otherwise called elocution. It is the choice of good style; that is, choosing words and sentence structures that match and could convey the needs of the subject and understanding of the employer. Language is indeed a vital ingredient in delivering a qualitative persuasive message. It means that the representative(s) of labour unions ought to be conscious of the language features they select. This is one essential fact that union's negotiators often fail to take into consideration in addressing their employers. Excessive use of figures of speech and ambiguous words prevents employers' understanding of arguments and subsequent messages. If figurative devices, proverbs and allusions must be made and used, they have to be moderately appropriated.

## 8. CONCLUSION

This paper has examined the extent to which rhetoric could be used as a tool for collective

bargaining for onward industrial harmony. The inarguable fact is that, in modern times, rhetoric has consistently remained relevant not just as a civic art but more importantly an instrument of objective persuasive argument that has enabled public speakers and negotiators to succeed. The application and appropriation of rhetoric in collective bargaining cannot be an exception. By improving argument through rhetoric, the negotiator or bargainer produces sound knowledge about the subject matters or issues of conflict, which in turn, govern and make way for better understanding, good interaction and harmonious working experience in an industrial community.

## **9. RECOMMENDATIONS**

To achieve industrial harmony especially in a recessed economy, as typified by some African or developing countries, collective bargainers (and even employers) should put into consideration the following recommendations:

1. The negotiators or collective bargainers, that is, the union leader(s) should be a person(s) well versed in oratorical or rhetorical skills. They should, therefore, be keen in applying the canons and various dimensions of rhetoric, earlier discussed. This will guide them to create persuasive arguments and messages.
2. The union leader(s) that champion negotiations should have credible character(s). According to Bizzell and Herzberg (2001: 486), credible character or ethos includes perceived intelligence, virtuous character and goodwill. Credible character further entails being good at listening carefully to the other party. This is necessary to encourage the other party to listen to the union's representative(s). All these can influence the employer to consider the negotiator(s) to be believable.
3. The negotiator should be dynamic, putting into consideration the reality on the ground. The union leader(s) or management team should approach round-table negotiation with the courage to accept the adjustments; confidence in the defenses to be made; decisiveness in the objectivity of claims and; eloquence in delivering the resolutions and adjustments to the members. The dynamism of the negotiators would necessitate quick resolution of disagreements.

4. Each party should, as much as possible, try to obtain agreement at each stage of negotiation. This will narrow the areas of disagreement and facilitate focusing on those aspects.
5. The management team of employers should evolve a means of ensuring that employees have a feeling of being treated with dignity and respect. A participative attitude on the part of the management will go a long way to encouraging the employees to make input in the affairs of the organization especially in the decision-making process. This tends to give the employees a feeling that they are important members of the organization. Such a feeling, in turn encourages a spirit of cooperation and dedication to work.
6. The negotiators of both parties should create effective communication system rather than engaging in unfounded assumption of supposed rejection or acceptance of items of demand. This is necessary since a poor communication system may breed unnecessary conflict, mistrust, suspicion, confusion and crisis. All these are not healthy for would-be successful collective bargaining.
7. The negotiators of both parties should not, from the outset, take the position that a particular item is not negotiable. It is more reasonable and harmony-inducing to request a party to justify its claims, and then point out why a certain claim is not reasonable. Taking up a non-negotiable position is counter-productive and can lead to a perception that the party is not willing to listen.

## **COMPETING INTERESTS**

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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