

PICKETING AND WORKPLACE FRUSTRATION OF OIL AND GAS FIRMS IN RIVERS STATE.

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Abstract

This study examined the relationship between picketing and workplace frustration of oil and gas firms in Rivers State, Nigeria. The objectives of the study were to investigate the relationship between informational picketing and perceived work obstacles; to determine the relationship between persuasive picketing and job dissatisfaction; and to assess the relationship between recognition picketing and emotional strain of oil and gas firms in Rivers State. The study was anchored on the Frustration-Aggression Theory. A correlational survey research design was adopted. The population comprised 198 management staff drawn from 22 registered oil servicing firms in Rivers State, with data collected from 182 managers and supervisors using a structured questionnaire. Spearman's rank order correlation was used for data analysis. The results revealed a moderate, positive, and statistically significant relationship between informational picketing and perceived work obstacles; a strong, positive, and statistically significant relationship between persuasive picketing and job dissatisfaction; and a strong, positive, and statistically significant relationship between recognition picketing and emotional strain. The findings underscore that as workers' experiences of workplace obstacles, dissatisfaction, and emotional strain intensify, their engagement in progressively more assertive forms of picketing increases correspondingly. The study concludes that unresolved workplace frustration is a critical driver of picketing behaviour in the oil and gas sector, and that proactive frustration-management strategies are vital for sustaining industrial harmony. It was recommended among others that management should institute accessible and credible grievance-resolution mechanisms to address perceived work obstacles before they escalate into informational picketing.

Keywords: *Picketing, Workplace frustration, Perceived work obstacles, Job dissatisfaction, Emotional strain, Oil and gas, Rivers State*

Background to the Study

Oil and gas firms are among the most important businesses in Nigeria because they provide a large share of the country's revenue, create employment opportunities, and contribute significantly to economic development. Rivers State is regarded as the centre of Nigeria's oil and gas industry, hosting many multinational oil companies, indigenous operators, and oil servicing firms. However, maintaining peaceful working relationships has remained a major challenge in many of these firms, as disagreements between employers and employees often result in industrial conflicts and protests (Ubeku, 2017).

One of the most visible signs of industrial conflict in oil and gas firms is picketing, the organized act of workers standing outside or around a workplace to protest, inform the public, or put pressure on an employer to address their grievances (Etim & Akpan, 2022). Under Nigerian labour law, the Trade Unions Act (Cap. T14, LFN, 2004) permits workers to picket peacefully as part of their fundamental rights to freedom of association and collective bargaining (Amachree & Konya, 2023). In Rivers State, picketing activities have been documented across major operators and service companies, organized by powerful unions such as the Nigeria Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers (NUPENG) and the Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association of Nigeria (PENGASSAN), ranging from informational picketing to persuasive and recognition picketing (Onyekwere & Amadi, 2021).

Research globally has consistently shown that when workers are frustrated, they become more likely to participate in and support disruptive industrial action. In Nigeria, unresolved worker grievances rooted in perceived unfair treatment, job insecurity, dangerous working conditions, and inadequate pay create fertile ground for picketing and other forms of industrial action (Fashoyin, 2005). Yet, despite this body of evidence, few studies have specifically examined how the different forms of picketing that workers engage in relate to the specific dimensions of workplace frustration experienced in the Nigerian oil and gas sector. This study therefore sets out to fill this gap by focusing on oil and gas firms in Rivers State, where the problem is most acute and the stakes are highest.

Statement of the Problem

Workplace frustration among oil and gas workers in Rivers State has become a serious organizational concern, as many employees experience persistent barriers that prevent them from performing their duties effectively. Workers frequently face inadequate tools, unclear directives, poor communication, unsafe working conditions, and perceived unfair treatment. As these frustrations accumulate, they often develop into collective expressions of dissatisfaction, particularly through picketing. Rather than resolving underlying workplace problems, many organizations respond to picketing with temporary or forceful measures that fail to address the actual sources of workers' frustration, allowing tensions to persist and re-emerge repeatedly.

Despite the growing occurrence of picketing in oil and gas firms, there is limited empirical research examining how specific forms of picketing relate to particular dimensions of workplace frustration among workers in Rivers State. Existing studies have focused more broadly on strikes, industrial disputes, and collective bargaining, while workplace frustration studies have concentrated largely on sectors outside the oil and gas industry. This creates a clear knowledge gap regarding the relationship between informational, persuasive, and recognition picketing and workers' experiences of work obstacles, job dissatisfaction, and emotional strain. The current study seeks to fill this gap by investigating the relationship between picketing with its dimensions such as informational picketing, persuasive picketing, recognition picketing and workplace frustration with its measures such as perceived work obstacles, job dissatisfaction and emotional strain in oil and gas firms in Rivers State.

Conceptual Framework

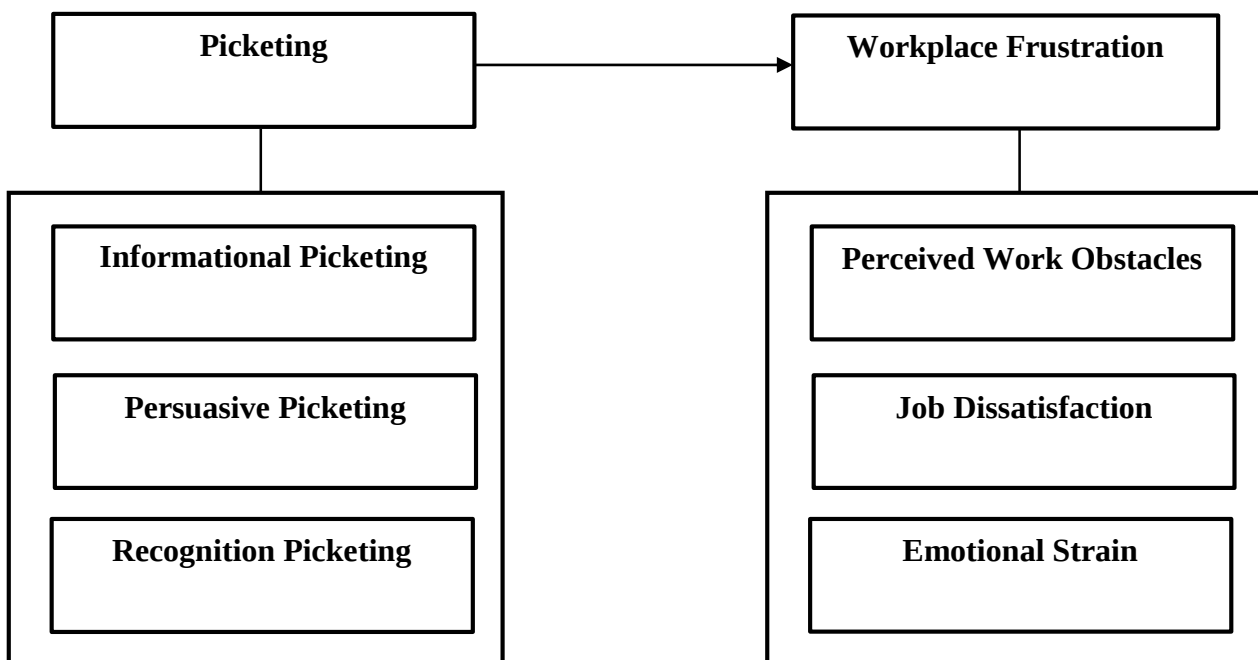


Fig. 1.1: Conceptual framework showing Picketing and Workplace Frustration.

Source: Dimensions of Picketing were adopted from Akinwale (2011) while measures of workplace frustration were adopted from Spector, (1997)

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of the study was to examine the relationship between picketing and workplace frustration of oil and gas firms in Rivers State. The specific objectives are to:

1. investigate the relationship between informational picketing and perceived work obstacles of oil and gas firms in Rivers State.
2. determine the relationship between persuasive picketing and job dissatisfaction of oil and gas firms in Rivers State.
3. assess the relationship between recognition picketing and emotional strain of oil and gas firms in Rivers State.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the relationship between informational picketing and perceived work obstacles of oil and gas firms in Rivers State?
2. What is the relationship between persuasive picketing and job dissatisfaction of oil and gas firms in Rivers State?
3. What is the relationship between recognition picketing and emotional strain of oil and gas firms in Rivers State?

Research Hypotheses

The following research hypotheses were formulated and tested in the study:

- H0₁:** There is no significant relationship between informational picketing and perceived work obstacles of oil and gas firms in Rivers State.
- H0₂:** There is no significant relationship between persuasive picketing and job dissatisfaction of oil and gas firms in Rivers State.
- H0₃:** There is no significant relationship between recognition picketing and emotional strain of oil and gas firms in Rivers State.

Review of Related Literature

Concept of Picketing

Picketing is one of the oldest and most recognizable tools of worker collective action. Lockwood (2020) defined picketing as the organized presence of workers or their union representatives at or near the workplace with the purpose of communicating a dispute, seeking support from the public, or discouraging others from entering the premises until management addresses specific demands. Under Nigerian labour law, the right to picket is protected under the Trade Unions Act (Cap. T14, LFN, 2004), provided that it is conducted peacefully and does not involve intimidation, obstruction, or violence (Eze & Okoli, 2022). Ubeku (2017) observed that picketing rarely emerges spontaneously; it is almost always preceded by a long period of unresolved grievances, failed dialogue, and accumulating worker frustration, which is precisely where the connection between picketing and workplace frustration becomes central. In the oil and gas industry in Rivers State, unions such as NUPENG and PENGASSAN have repeatedly used picketing to draw attention to issues ranging from wage arrears and unsafe working conditions to the casualization of labour and the failure of management to recognize union rights (Nwosu & Amachree, 2022).

Informational Picketing: This is the form of picketing mainly intended to communicate information to the public about a workplace dispute rather than to disrupt business activities. Workers or their union representatives carry placards, distribute leaflets, or engage the public to

share factual information about a grievance, without necessarily attempting to prevent work from continuing (Onyekwere & Amadi, 2021). It is generally regarded as the least confrontational and most peaceful form of picketing, adopted during the early stages of a dispute when workers still hope that public attention will encourage management to negotiate (Akinwale, 2011). Nwuche and Awa (2011) found that in organizations where internal grievance procedures were perceived as ineffective or biased in favour of management, informational picketing provided an important alternative communication channel.

Persuasive Picketing: This form of picketing goes beyond providing information by actively encouraging fellow workers, contractors, suppliers, and other stakeholders not to cross the picket line or continue doing business with an organization until grievances have been addressed. It is regarded as more assertive and confrontational than informational picketing because it directly attempts to influence the actions of third parties, thereby increasing both economic and reputational pressure on management (Akinwale, 2011). Fashoyin (2005) documented instances where union affiliates successfully used persuasive picketing to disrupt supply chains serving oil companies, generating sufficient economic pressure to compel management to return to the negotiating table.

Recognition Picketing: This is a form of picketing in which workers collectively demand that management formally recognize their trade union as the legitimate representative of employees for the purpose of collective bargaining. It usually occurs when management refuses to recognize a newly established union, attempts to withdraw recognition from an existing union, or ignores workers' requests for collective bargaining (Akinwale, 2011). Within the oil and gas industry in Rivers State, recognition picketing has been more common among indigenous firms and smaller oil servicing companies where resistance to unionization has historically been stronger, as management in such firms often prefers to retain unilateral control over employment conditions (Fajana, 2005).

Concept of Workplace Frustration

Workplace frustration is a negative emotional state that develops when workers perceive that internal or external obstacles are preventing them from achieving their work goals or receiving fair rewards for their efforts (Spector, 1997). Etim and Akpan (2022) described it as the growing irritation of employees who repeatedly encounter unresolved problems, unsafe conditions, or unresponsive management. The theoretical foundation of workplace frustration can be traced to the frustration-aggression theory developed by Dollard et al. (1939), which argues that blocked goal-directed behaviour naturally generates some form of aggressive response, whether expressed as reduced productivity, withdrawal, or participation in collective industrial action such as picketing (Nwuche & Awa, 2011). Within Nigeria's oil and gas industry, workplace frustration tends to be more severe because of the hazardous nature of operations, strict production schedules, and intense performance expectations, and unresolved frustrations tend to accumulate over time before manifesting in protests, strikes, and picketing (Fashoyin, 2005).

Perceived Work Obstacles: This refers to the conditions, situations, or organizational practices that employees believe are preventing them from carrying out their work effectively and achieving expected job outcomes (Onyekwere & Amadi, 2021). Workers often believe that many of these obstacles, such as inadequate resources, poor supervision, or bureaucratic delays, could be eliminated through better planning and communication, and interpret persistent barriers as evidence of management neglect. Nwuche and Awa (2011) found that perceived work obstacles are among the strongest predictors of negative employee attitudes, including reduced productivity and participation in industrial action, while Spector (1997) reported a strong positive correlation between the frequency of perceived obstacles and employees' experiences of workplace frustration.

Job Dissatisfaction: This refers to the negative feelings and overall unfavourable opinion an employee develops toward his or her job when expectations regarding pay, working conditions, supervision, or career advancement are not met (Mayaki & Stewart, 2020). Ubeku (2017) found that employees in the Nigerian oil and gas sector consistently expressed dissatisfaction with pay equity, supervisory behaviour, and workplace safety, while Fashoyin (2005) observed that dissatisfaction is particularly severe among contract and casual workers who receive lower pay and fewer benefits than permanent staff despite similar or more hazardous duties, deepening feelings of inequality that encourage greater support for unions and collective bargaining.

Emotional Strain: This refers to the psychological and emotional pressure employees experience when exposed to continuous workplace challenges, stress, and frustration over a prolonged period, manifesting in anxiety, exhaustion, irritability, and reduced capacity to cope with work demands (Oluwafemi & Balogun, 2019). In the oil and gas industry, emotional strain is intensified by hazardous conditions, long working hours, remote operational locations, and prolonged separation from family. Akinwale (2020) found that workers experiencing high levels of emotional strain are more likely to participate in collective industrial actions, including picketing, because prolonged emotional pressure reduces their willingness to tolerate continuing workplace frustrations.

Theoretical Review: Frustration-Aggression Theory

The Frustration-Aggression Theory was propounded by Dollard, Doob, Miller, Mowrer, and Sears in 1939. The theory holds that when people are blocked from achieving a goal, they become frustrated, and frustrated people respond with some form of aggression. Although later scholars, particularly Berkowitz (1989), refined the theory to acknowledge that frustration does not always produce direct aggression, its core insight remains relevant to the study of picketing: workers who are repeatedly frustrated at work will eventually respond, and picketing is a form of collective, organized response directed at the source of that frustration, the employer.

Assumptions of the Theory: the theory is built on the following assumptions: (i) frustration arises from the blocking of goal-directed behaviour; (ii) frustration is an active motivational state that energizes individuals to act, including through collective action; (iii) some form of response is a natural and predictable consequence of sustained frustration, taking institutionalized forms such as grievance filing, strikes, and picketing; (iv) frustration is cumulative, so that small, repeated frustrating experiences accumulate over time until they reach a threshold beyond which collective responses become more likely; and (v) collective frustration shared among many workers is more likely to produce organized collective responses such as picketing than individual frustration acting alone.

Relevance of the Theory to the Study: the Frustration-Aggression Theory is relevant because the study examines how workplace frustration in the forms of perceived work obstacles, job dissatisfaction, and emotional strain relates to picketing among workers in oil and gas firms. The theory predicts that when workers are repeatedly frustrated and internal channels for relief are inadequate, they will respond with organized collective action, with informational, persuasive, and recognition picketing representing progressively more assertive responses consistent with increasing intensity of frustration.

Empirical Review

Onyekwere and Amadi (2021) investigated the relationship between workplace frustration and industrial action in oil servicing firms in Rivers State using a descriptive survey design and Spearman's Rank Order Correlation, and found that all three measures of workplace frustration had significant positive relationships with industrial action, with emotional strain showing the strongest correlation with recognition picketing. Similarly, Nwosu and Amachree (2022) examined the effect

of job dissatisfaction on picketing behaviour in oil and gas firms in South-South Nigeria and found that job dissatisfaction, particularly pay inequity and poor supervisory behaviour, had a significant positive relationship with persuasive picketing. Nwuche and Awa (2011) reported that perceived work obstacles were the strongest predictor of counterproductive work behaviours, including participation in informational picketing, especially among workers in organizations with poor grievance management systems. Amachree and Konya (2023) found that emotional strain had a significant positive relationship with recognition picketing, particularly among workers in firms that had historically resisted unionization, while Etim and Akpan (2022) reported that perceived injustice and work obstacles were the strongest predictors of informational and persuasive picketing among indigenous oil companies in Rivers State. These findings collectively suggest that dimensions of workplace frustration are consistently and positively associated with corresponding forms of picketing, though gaps remain regarding the simultaneous examination of all three dimensions within the oil and gas sector in Rivers State, which the current study addresses.

Methodology

The study adopted a correlational survey research design. The population of the study comprised 198 management staff drawn from 22 registered oil servicing firms in Rivers State. Data on the population were obtained from Finelib (2026). A census sampling technique was used because the population was small and manageable. Data were collected using a self-designed questionnaire titled the Picketing and Workplace Frustration Questionnaire (PWFQ), structured on a four-point Likert scale of Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. The instrument was validated by experts, and its reliability was confirmed through a Cronbach Alpha reliability test, yielding a coefficient of 0.74, which indicated acceptable internal consistency. Questionnaires were administered to respondents across the firms, and completed copies were retrieved. A total of 198 copies were administered across the 22 oil servicing companies in Rivers State. Out of these, 182 copies, representing 92%, were successfully retrieved and used for analysis. Data were analysed with Spearman's Rank Order Correlation Coefficient at a 0.05 significance level via SPSS.

Results

H0₁: There is no significant relationship between informational picketing and perceived work obstacles of oil and gas firms in Rivers State.

Table 1: Correlations between informational picketing and perceived work obstacles

			Informational Picketing	Perceived Work Obstacles
Spearman's rho	Informational Picketing	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.512**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	182	182
	Perceived Work Obstacles	Correlation Coefficient	.512**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	182	182

****.** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Field Work, 2026

The correlation result shows a Spearman's rho value of 0.512 with a significance level of 0.000, which is less than the 0.01 threshold. This indicates a moderate, positive, and statistically significant relationship between informational picketing and perceived work obstacles in oil and gas firms in Rivers State. In practical terms, this means that as workers perceive more obstacles such as

inadequate tools, unclear instructions, or bureaucratic delays, their engagement in informational picketing to draw public and management attention to these obstacles correspondingly increases. Since the p-value is below 0.01, the null hypothesis (H_{01}), which states that there is no significant relationship between the two variables, is rejected.

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between persuasive picketing and job dissatisfaction of oil and gas firms in Rivers State.

Table 2: Correlations between persuasive picketing and job dissatisfaction

			Persuasive Picketing	Job Dissatisfaction
Spearman's rho	Persuasive Picketing	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.647**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	182	182
	Job Dissatisfaction	Correlation Coefficient	.647**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	182	182

****.** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Field Work, 2026

The correlation analysis for Hypothesis Two reveals a Spearman's rho value of 0.647 with a significance value of 0.000, indicating a strong, positive, and statistically significant relationship between persuasive picketing and job dissatisfaction in oil and gas firms in Rivers State. This means that workers who are more dissatisfied with pay, supervisory behaviour, or career advancement opportunities are more willing to engage in persuasive picketing, actively encouraging others not to cross the picket line or do business with the firm. Since the p-value (0.000) is below the 0.01 significance threshold, the result is statistically significant, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis (H_{02}).

H₀₃: There is no significant relationship between recognition picketing and emotional strain of oil and gas firms in Rivers State.

Table 3: Correlations between recognition picketing and emotional strain

			Recognition Picketing	Emotional Strain
Spearman's rho	Recognition Picketing	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.719**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	182	182
	Emotional Strain	Correlation Coefficient	.719**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	182	182

****.** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Field Work, 2026

The correlation analysis for Hypothesis Three reveals a Spearman's rho value of 0.719 with a significance value of 0.000, indicating a strong, positive, and statistically significant relationship

between recognition picketing and emotional strain in oil and gas firms in Rivers State. This is the strongest of the three relationships examined, suggesting that workers who experience high levels of anxiety, exhaustion, and hopelessness from prolonged, unresolved grievances are the most likely to engage in recognition picketing to demand that management formally acknowledge their union. Since the p-value (0.000) is below the 0.01 significance threshold, the null hypothesis (H03) is rejected.

Discussion of Findings

Informational Picketing and Perceived Work Obstacles

The result of the first hypothesis revealed a moderate and statistically significant positive relationship between informational picketing and perceived work obstacles in oil and gas firms in Rivers State ($r = 0.512$, $p < 0.01$). This finding implies that as workers encounter more obstacles in their day-to-day duties, such as inadequate resources, unclear instructions, or bureaucratic bottlenecks, they increasingly resort to informational picketing to publicize these concerns. This outcome aligns with the findings of Onyekwere and Amadi (2021), who reported that perceived work obstacles were significantly associated with industrial action in oil servicing firms, and with Nwuche and Awa (2011), who found perceived obstacles to be a strong predictor of workers' transition to informational picketing where internal grievance systems were weak. The present study supports these earlier findings, reinforcing the conclusion that unresolved operational obstacles are a central driver of the least confrontational form of picketing.

Persuasive Picketing and Job Dissatisfaction

The analysis of the second hypothesis demonstrated a strong and significant positive relationship between persuasive picketing and job dissatisfaction among employees of oil and gas firms in Rivers State ($r = 0.647$, $p < 0.01$). This suggests that employees who are dissatisfied with pay, supervisory behaviour, or career prospects are more willing to actively persuade colleagues, contractors, and other stakeholders to withhold cooperation from the firm. This finding is consistent with the work of Nwosu and Amachree (2022), who found that job dissatisfaction, particularly pay inequity and poor supervision, was significantly associated with persuasive picketing, and with Mayaki and Stewart (2020), who linked unmet job expectations to more assertive forms of collective action. The strong correlation observed in this study supports earlier empirical evidence that job dissatisfaction is a powerful driver of persuasive, economically pressuring forms of protest.

Recognition Picketing and Emotional Strain

The result of the third hypothesis revealed a strong and statistically significant positive relationship between recognition picketing and emotional strain among employees of oil and gas firms in Rivers State ($r = 0.719$, $p < 0.01$), the strongest relationship among the three examined. This indicates that workers who experience the greatest psychological and emotional burden from unresolved grievances are the most likely to engage in recognition picketing to demand formal union acknowledgement. This finding is consistent with Amachree and Konya (2023), who found emotional strain to be significantly related to recognition picketing, particularly in firms historically resistant to unionization, and with Akinwale (2020) and Etim and Akpan (2022), who similarly identified emotional exhaustion as the strongest predictor of recognition-seeking collective action. The results affirm that emotional strain represents the most intense pathway through which workplace frustration translates into picketing behaviour.

Conclusion

This study examined the relationship between picketing and workplace frustration in oil and gas firms in Rivers State. The findings demonstrated that informational picketing is moderately and positively related to perceived work obstacles, persuasive picketing is strongly and positively related to job dissatisfaction, and recognition picketing is strongly and positively related to emotional strain,

with the latter representing the most intense relationship. These outcomes underscore that picketing is not a spontaneous or isolated event but a graduated response to accumulating workplace frustration, with the intensity of picketing rising alongside the intensity of frustration experienced by workers. The study concludes that oil and gas firms in Rivers State cannot achieve sustained industrial harmony without proactively identifying and addressing the specific sources of workplace frustration among their employees before they escalate into disruptive collective action.

Recommendations

1. Oil and gas firms should institute accessible and credible internal mechanisms for identifying and resolving perceived work obstacles, such as inadequate tools and bureaucratic delays, to reduce workers' reliance on informational picketing.
2. Management should address the structural drivers of job dissatisfaction, including pay equity and supervisory practices, to minimize workers' recourse to persuasive picketing.
3. Management should prioritize employees' psychological well-being and formally engage recognized unions in collective bargaining to reduce the emotional strain that drives recognition picketing.

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