

**INFLUENCE OF ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS ON COLLECTIVE BARGAINING FOR
SUSTAINABLE ORGANIZATIONAL DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA**

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Abstract

Collective bargaining is a group of persons (workers) as a whole who enter into agreement with the management over the issue of wages, hours of work, working conditions, termination procedures promotion, transport allowances and housing allowances that may affect the workers. The paper moved horizontally across three-tiered framework by examining how the environment influences the bargaining process and bargaining outcomes at the functional level. The discussion focuses on five aspects of the environment: the economic, public policy, demographic, social, and technological contexts of the bargaining relationship. Past studies were reviewed to obtain the necessary information for the research, which was qualitatively analyzed. The paper concluded that the economic environment is most important through the effects it exerts on the bargaining power held by labour and management. The work also recommended that public policy should determine how unions should be formed and sustain themselves.

Key-Words: Environment, Collective, Bargaining, Organization, Employers, Employees.

Introduction

Collective bargaining can be defined as negotiations about working conditions and terms of employment between an employer, a group of employers, one or more employers' organization on the one hand and one or more representative workers' organization on the other hand with a view to reaching agreement (Ajuogu, 1995). However, workers organization must be accepted as a party before collective bargaining in Nigeria, and it must have been registered as a trade union for the category of workers whose working conditions are being considered. The industrial relations system is regulated by collective bargaining, and seen as a social process that continually turns disagreements into agreements in an orderly fashion. Thus, collective bargaining is the establishment by negotiation and discussion of agreement on matters of mutual concern to employers and unions covering the employment relationship and terms and conditions of employment. It therefore, provides a framework within which the views of management and unions about disputed matters that could lead to industrial disorder can be considered, with the aim of eliminating the causes of the disorder. Collective bargaining is a joint regulating process, dealing with the regulation of management in its relationships with work, people as well as the regulation of conditions of employment. It has a political as well as an economic basis, that is, both sides are interested in the distribution of power between them as well as the distribution of

income. Armstrong (2009), asserted that collective bargaining can be regarded as an exchange relationship in which wage-work bargains take place between employers and employees through the agency of a trade union. Thus, traditionally, the role of trade unions as bargaining agents has been perceived as being to offset the inequalities of individual bargaining power between employers and employees in the labour market. It is not in the interest of employers to negotiate with each employee in conditions that govern the working conditions of such employee in the work situation rather the practice is that once a trade union is registered in Nigeria, the management and that union will then bargain collectively over matters relating to wages, hours of work, regulation and such other matters concerning the employees. It is really necessary to point out that with collective bargaining, management and union arrive at agreement which will govern both the present and future workers.

Conceptual Framework to Analyze the Environment: Dunlop Model

This work uses as a framework an extension of the model proposed by John Dunlop. Dunlop classified the industrial relations environment into three main influences: (1) the economic context, (2) the technological context, and (3) the locus of power in the larger society (Dunlop, 1958). The underlying theme is that labour and management can influence the environment and the environment also influences them. On the other hand, Okere (2019), argued that the external environment provides both incentives and constraints to labour and management in their efforts to meet their bargaining goals; thus it is important to consider how the environment shapes the power of the bargaining parties. On the other hand, the parties to collective bargaining also seek to mold their environment to better serve their needs, thus environmental influences are not entirely outside human control.

Bargaining Power

The extent to which industrial sovereignty is shared by management with its trade unions depends upon the relative bargaining powers of the parties. Armstrong (2009), said bargaining power can be defined as the ability to induce the other side to make a decision or take a course of action that it would otherwise be unwilling to make. Each side is involved in guessing the bargaining preferences and bargaining power of the other side. Thus, bargaining power is the ability of one party to achieve its goals in bargaining in the presence of opposition by another party to the process. In the opinion of Singh (1989), bargaining power is inherent in any situation where differences have to be reconciled. It is however, not an end in itself and negotiations must not rely solely on bargaining power. One side may have enormous bargaining power, but to use it to the point where the other side feels that it is impossible to deal with such a party is to defeat the purpose of negotiations. Hawkins (1979) suggested that a crucial test of bargaining power is whether the cost to one side in accepting a proposal from the other is higher than the cost of not accepting it.

Alkison (1989) believe that:

- (1) What creates bargaining power can be appraised in terms of subjective assessments by individuals involved in the bargaining process.
- (2) Each side can guess the bargaining preferences and bargaining power of the other side.
- (3) There are normally a number of elements creating bargaining power.

The environmental is particularly influential through the effects it exerts on the bargaining power held by labour and management. Thus, bargaining power is the ability of one party to achieve its goals in bargaining in the presence of opposition by another party to the process.

Sources of Power for Labour and Management

The bargaining power says Okere (2019) enjoyed by a union is heavily influenced by the union's and its members' abilities to withdraw their labour, usually through a strike. Workers are more likely to win higher wages and other gains the more they are willing and able to sustain a strike. Moreover, strikes, once undertaken, are more likely to succeed the greater the costs of the strike to the employer. Thus, the employer's bargaining power is heavily influenced by their ability to withstand a strike. The simplest measure of bargaining power is the amount of strike leverage each party holds. Workers can also withdraw their labour through more informal actions, such as "working to rule" that is, following rules strictly rather than pursuing effective work practices; the "blue flu", that is, large scale worker absenteeism, and other means of slowing production.

How Strike Leverage Influences Bargaining Power

The relative degree to which workers and the employer are willing and able to sustain a strike is their strike leverage. More specifically, to measure each party's strike leverage, one needs to know what costs a strike would impose on each party and what alternative income sources there are available to each part to offset any income losses induced by a strike.

Economic Context

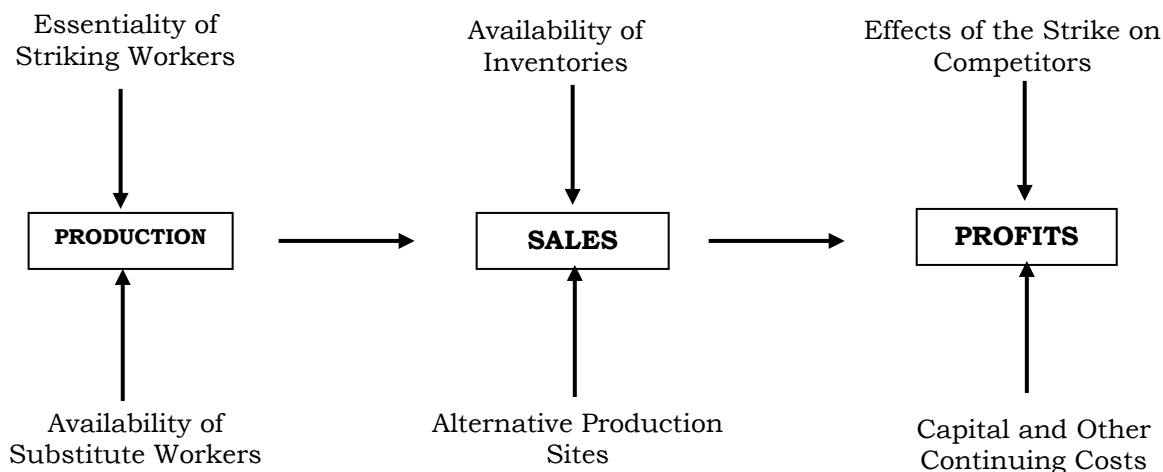
Economic factors are particularly important in bargaining power and strike leverage. According to Okere (2011) economic factors can be separated into those that are macro-level that is economy wide, and those that are micro-level that is, relevant only to a specific bargaining relationship. A common thread joins the macro and microeconomic factors, however, both exert much of their influence through their effects on the bargaining power of the two parties.

Microeconomic Influence on Bargaining Power

Richard (1979), observed that a number of microeconomic factors on bargaining power concern individual actors, either a worker or a firm. Strike leverage on both sides is where these factors coalesce.

Management's Strike Leverage: The more an employer is willing and able to sustain a strike, the more likely the workforce will be to settle a strike before attaining all the union's goals. Employee strike leverage is derived from the strike's influence on firm profits. The greater the profits lost by the firm, the more ready the firm will be to give in to labour demands. During a strike a firm's profits are, in turn, shaped by a strike's effects on production and sales. Exhibit I shows the principal determinants of an employer's strike leverage: workers' ability to harm production, sales, and profits; and management's ability to find alternative means to maintain production, sales, and profits.

Exhibit 1: Determinants of Management's Strike Leverage



- 1. Effects of a Strike on Production:** Once a strike has begun, the first indicator of workers' bargaining power is the degree to which the strike has impaired production and/or service. Workers who succeed in actually halting production because there are no readily available labour substitutes such as supervisors, employees in or from another plant, strike breakers, or automated equipment have substantial strike leverage and bargaining power. In other words, these workers are essential to the production process.
- 2. Effects of a Strike on Sales:** The power of a striking work-group is tempered, however, if the halt in production does not lead to a reduction in sales. Employers can sever, or at least weaken, the link between production and sales if inventories are high or if alternative production sites can be used to produce what normally would be produced at the struck site.
- 3. Effects of a Strike on Profits:** Even if production and sales are stopped by a strike, the firm may not necessarily witness a serious decline in profits. For example, firms with relatively high ongoing capital or interests expenses have a harder time withstanding a loss of income caused by a strike.

Union's Strike Leverage: A union's strike leverage is determined by the ability and willingness of the workforce to stay out on strike. The longer workers are willing and able to stay on strike, the greater the bargaining power held by the union representing those workers and the more likely they are to win favourable employment terms from an employer, other factors held constant.

- 1. Alternative Sources of Worker Income:** Workers' willingness to stay out on strike is heavily influenced by the degree to which alternative sources of income are available to the striking workforce.
- 2. Worker Solidarity:** Another set of factors that influence worker strike leverage beyond the microeconomic environment is the attitude of union members. Workers' feelings of solidarity with one another influence whether picket lines will be honoured and any pent-up frustrations will influence workers' willingness to stay out on strike.

Wage-Employment Trade-Off: Strike leverage determines whether workers are able to press for a higher wage settlement or other more advantageous contractual provisions. But higher wages often bring cuts in employment, and thus unions may, in some cases, choose not to raise wages as much as they could. This is called the wage-employment trade-off. The

key point is that there are employment effects from wage increases as well as direct wage gains.

Marshall's Four Basic Conditions: Unions are more likely to consider the employment effects that result from a wage increase when these effects are greater. In his seminal analysis of labour and management bargaining power, Marshall (1920), suggested that unions are most powerful when the demand for labour is highly inelastic, that is, when increases in wages will not result in significant reductions in employment in the unionized sector. Marshall further proposed four basic conditions under which the demand for union labour would be inelastic: (1) when labour cannot be easily replaced in the production process by other workers or machines; (2) when the demand for the final product is price inelastic, that is, demand is not sensitive to changes in the price of the product; (3) when the supply of non-labour factors of production is price inelastic; and (4) when the ratio of labour costs to total costs is small (Richard, 1979).

Macroeconomic Influences on Bargaining Power

Economists refer to unemployment and the growth in national product or productivity as macroeconomic factors, those aspects of the whole economy that affect bargaining power through a variety of channels. A union's strike leverage, for example depends in part on the availability of jobs, both for the striking workers and for their spouses or other family members who might help support the strikers. The higher the unemployment rate, the less likely striking workers or family members will be to find substitute employment and the more likely the family members normally employed will be on layoff. Thus, during the upswing of a business cycle that is, as the unemployment rate declines, unions generally gain strike leverage (Daniel, 1980). Conversely, the power of unions declines during periods of falling product demand and rising unemployment. That is during period of slack demand employers may, in fact, welcome a strike because they can then lower their inventories and use the strike as a substitute for layoff.

Macroeconomic Factors Affecting Bargaining Power

- 1. Wage Flexibility Over the Business Cycle:** The connection between macroeconomic conditions and bargaining power is supported by evidence that the rate of wage increases in the economy responds to the business cycle. Wages rise more quickly in times of a growing economy, and they increase more slowly, or fall, in times of sluggish macroeconomic activity. Nevertheless, Daniel (1980), argued that declines in products demand and increases in unemployment have been shown to have a weaker downward effect on collectively bargained wage increases than on wage increase in the nonunion sector. Okere (2003), observed that unions to aggressively resist wage cutting, making it harder for union employers than for nonunion employers to cut wages or to moderate the pace of wage increases during recessionary periods. The fact that union wage rates are often set in multi-year agreements, makes union wages responsive than nonunion wages to changing economic conditions.
- 2. Income Policies:** According to Farrell and Mark (1978) income policies represent another macroeconomic factor that can affect bargaining power and collective bargaining. Income policies are direct efforts by the government to set wages and other employment conditions. Although income policies designed to limit precisely the size of wage and price increases have not been used in Nigeria, they had important effects on collective bargaining.

Effects of Collective Bargaining on Macroeconomic Performance

The analysis of the macroeconomics of collective bargaining cannot close without identifying how bargaining outcomes in turn affect the economy itself. Bargaining outcomes says Okere (2019), not only illustrate the success of the macroeconomic policies designed to curb inflation and unemployment, but they also add a dynamic component of feed to our framework. Thus, bargaining outcomes influence the economic context for future collective bargaining negotiations and set the cycle of events in motion again. The effects of collective bargaining settlements on the economy are complex and hotly debated by economists. There is much debate, for example, surrounding whether unions are the cause of inflation. Okere, (2003), asserted that a more significant way in which unions might cause the inflation rate to rise is through the slower response of union wages than non-union wages to changing economic conditions. A number of studies have shown that wages in the unionized sector, respond to increases in unemployment than do wages in the nonunion sector (Farrell and Mark, 1978). Thus, traditional strategies for reducing the rate of inflation by increasing the rate of unemployment and thereby holding down wage increases may be less effective for union wages than for nonunion wages. Some observers like Okere (2003); Harrison (1994), have argued that all of these direct economic effects of unions on wages are less important in the overall wage-price inflationary spiral than are the political lobbying efforts of unions. For example, a wage-price spiral would continue only if the government pursues expansionary monetary or fiscal policies, or both Kochan and Michael (1996), established that an expansionary policy encourages enough economic growth and allows the reemployment of any workers displaced by inflationary wage increases. Although the labour movement is certainly not the only lobbying group that supports expansionary monetary and fiscal policies, its support is a critical supplement to its more decentralized strategies to achieve individual wage and benefits agreements. Without an adequate rate of expansion and economic growth, collectively bargained wage increases would exert a greater toll on the employment opportunities of unionized members of the labour force.

Legal and Public Policy Context

Harry and Thomas (2000) highlighted that law and public policy influence the legal standing of unions, unions' bargaining power, and employment conditions. Public policy determines how easy it is for unions to form and sustain themselves. Imagine what would happen in a country where unionism was deemed to be illegal and workers were sent to jail if they tried to form unions or to carry out strikes. One would expect that under such a public policy there would be few unions and little activity carried out by organized representatives of workers. With unions and union activity outlawed one would expect workers to exert little countervailing influences to other powerful social forces. Harrison (1994) posit that "banning unions is one extreme. Legally requiring union membership is potentially the other extreme role that public policy may play". There is no democratic government that has chosen to follow this course. Rather, public policies toward unionism in democratic countries have taken a middle course between the extremes of banning and requiring unionism. There exists sizeable variation across democratic countries in the regulations concerning which and how workers can join unions. In every country there also has been significant change in the regulations for unions over time.

Demographic Context

The changing nature of the labour force has also caused many to question whether collective bargaining is obsolete. It is therefore important to examine the nature of those changes and to explore their implications for collective bargaining. Changing in the demographic characteristics of workers or jobs will influence the needs and expectations of workers. These in turn, may affect the individual's interest in union membership or willingness to stay out on strike.

A Labour Force Trends

Since World War II, labour force has grown at an unprecedented rate, largely as a result of the postwar baby boom. The labour force then began to grow more slowly in the 1990s than in the previous years as fewer baby boomers entered the labour force (Okere, 2003). This means that over the course of this century unions and employers have faced with a young but ageing work force as the baby boom cohort moves through its prime working years. As this happens, employees sharpen competition for jobs at the higher levels of careers and occupations. However, workers may become frustrated if their aspiration for upward mobility is not attainable. This could produce workplace conflicts with a heightened demand for employee participation and voice, and possibly, for union representation. According to Harry and Thomas (2000), over the longer run, the problem of an ageing population will become increasingly important, and the ratio of those not in the labour to those in the labour force will increase, that is, posing difficult problems indeed for all the actors in the industrial relations system.

1. Women in the Labour Force

The growing number of working women is one of the most significant labour force developments (U.S Department of Labour, 1997). One component of the trend has been the increased participation in the labour force of women with young children. Women have been taken less time off from work for child rearing. The general trend can largely be explained by women's changing marital status, educational attainment, and career expectations. Consequently, says Harry and Thomas (2000) working mothers have begun to challenge employers and unions to meet their social needs. They pose a particular challenge because the propensity to work has been greater among the more highly educated women. Thus, in addition to being a growing component of the labour force, women may well become a vocal component. Their increasing numbers and their increasing education, militancy, and consciousness of women's issues may pressure employers and unions to change their postures toward female workers. Finally, women may present a new focal point for union-organizing campaigns.

2. Educational Attainment

The educational attainment of workers has increased over the years. Harry and Thomas (2000) maintained that in 1990 the median number of years of school completed for all workers was 13% or just slightly beyond a high school degree. It was 12.4% in 1970. Accordingly, the researchers observed that in 1970, 63.9% of all workers had graduated from high school and 12.9% had graduated from university. By 1993, 29% of the work force had graduated from university. Thus, the labour force is becoming more highly educated. Also, there is however, an important caveat says Harry and Thomas (2000) to consider in projecting the overall "quality" of labour force. High rates of teenage unemployment, high dropout rates from high schools, and the poor quality of education offered in when and, particularly, in poor urban areas all suggest that a large number of new entrants in the labour force over the next decade will have little work experience, few skills, and a low potential for adapting to the rigors of organizational life. Teenagers who grow up in areas with few or no jobs, high rates of crime, and poor schools will pose significant challenges to managers and union leaders of the future. Past experience has shown that it is difficult indeed for employers to reverse the effects of these liabilities. These two separate educational patterns pose different but equally challenging problems to future managers and union leaders. The more highly educated workers may be less tolerant of authority, seek more involvement on their jobs, and demand more career development opportunities, while the educationally disadvantaged will require more remedial training to mold them into more literate, trainable, and motivated participants in the labour force.

Occupational and Industry Trends

Major shifts in industry demand over the years have profound implications for collective bargaining. The portion of the labour force employed in manufacturing jobs, the traditional stronghold of unions, has declined significantly. Furthermore, according to Okere (2003) manufacturing industries have been migrating from one region to another. There has been a sizeable movement of jobs away from the most unionized industries and regions to industries and areas where unions have traditionally been less successful in organizing workers.

Demographic Profile of Union Members

The average union member is more apt to be working in industries, occupations, and regions in which the demand for labour is either declining or growing at a slower pace than elsewhere in the economy (Okere, 2003). In addition, women, whose labour force participation is increasing rapidly, are underrepresented in the unionized sector. There are many challenges posed for unions by these developments. Harry and Thomas (2000) argued that the traditional constituency of unions that is, male, blue-collar, manufacturing, mining, construction, and transportation workers living in different parts of regions is declining in significance. Current union members are on average older and less well educated than the new entrants to the labour force. Union may have difficulty adjusting to the demands of a younger, more vocal constituency.

Demographic Challenges for Unions

According to Harry and Thomas (2000) demographic diversity can affect union policies. Once they join unions, people tend to shape union policies to reflect their own preference. This process of political representation becomes troublesome to unions if members' views change rapidly. The very purpose of a union is to pursue the common goals of its members through the exercise of collective power. Thus, the more rapid the demography changes and the more heterogeneous the union constituency becomes, the greater the potential for internal conflict and the more difficult the union will have in trying to establish bargaining priorities. Okere (2019) concluded that the demographic context of collective bargaining influences union membership that is, the attitudes union members have toward their jobs, and the skills workers bring to the job.

Social Context

What is the image of the union movement in the eyes of the public? Is the society supportive of or hostile to unions? These are aspects of the social context that can affect industrial relations. Analysis of a wide range of poll data shows that the public and union members hold complex attitudes toward unions. Polls consistently have shown that the public holds union leaders in low esteem (Harry and Thomas, 2000). But although, skeptical of union leaders, the public has continued to express strong approval of the functions union perform in representing worker interests. Poll show, for example, that a majority of the population approve of unions in general and believe in the right of workers to join unions of their own choosing (James 1984). Thus, the majority of the public apparently accept the legitimacy of unions as a means for protecting the economic and job-related interest of workers. However, workers also seem to have a dual image of trade unions. On the one hand, the majority of workers see unions as big, powerful institutions in society that exert significant control over political decision making and elected officials, as well as over employers and union members. The majority also takes a skeptical view of union leaders' personal motivations. On the other hand, an equally large majority of workers see unions as being helpful or instrumental in improving the working lives of their members (Okere, 2019). Evidently, then, most workers are skeptical of the political activities of trade unions but accepting of their collective bargaining activities (Paul, 1988).

Technological Context

Both Karl Max and John R. Commons believed that workers were spurred to join unions by technological change, the shift from craft systems of production to the hiring of wage labour, and the rise of the modern factory system. But they disagreed sharply over exactly why changes in technology and the organization of work had that effect. To Marx the critical event in industrialization was the chasm that capitalist method of production opened up between workers and the owners of the means of production. That chasm, according to Marx, would inevitably result in a worsening of working conditions, a profit crisis, and the emergence of a revolutionary class consciousness among workers (Stephen, 1990). Followers of Marx went on to agree that it was the loss of control that workers experienced as a result of the shift in production methods and ownership that led them to form unions. To those observers collective bargaining was, and is, a continuing battle between workers and managers over control of the production process. Harry (1984) built on this argument and claimed that technological change typically lead to a lowering of the skills required in jobs, as part of this battle for control. Common, on the other hand, observed that the shift in production methods was itself a product of an expansion of the market brought about by urbanization and new transportation methods. To common, as the market expanded and the ownership of production changed, workers came up against a host of competitive menaces such as prison or child labour. Workers then turned to unions to protect themselves and to improve their standard of living. Selig (1979) argued that unions and workers sought income and job security rather than control of the production process. To Clark et al (1960) it was the process of industrialization and not capitalism per se that brought forth the changes in the relationship between workers and employers that, in turn, led to unionization. The researchers argued that modern technology produced a need for rules to govern relations between workers and employers. Collective bargaining and contractually negotiated rules were a logical way to formalize and structure the rules required in modern industry. Given this framework, specific technological changes are important within collective bargaining because they result in changes in the relative bargaining power held by management or labour.

Environmental Pressures on Collective Bargaining

Harry and Thomas (2000), highlighted that in the 1990s a number of changes in the environment placed unions at a distinct disadvantage. A macroeconomic recession in 1990 – 1991 brought large numbers of layoffs and sharp increase in the unemployment rate. Even when the economy improved, as it did strongly from the early 1990s, corporate restructuring, heightened international competition, nonunion competition, union image problems, signs of innovation in the labour movement, and the availability of outsourcing continued to put pressure on unions.

Method Adopted

The paper adopted critically literature survey method to gather information concerning the areas bordering on the subject matter. The information obtained was qualitatively analyzed.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper examines how the environment influences the collective bargaining power process. The five key aspects of the environment are economic, public policy, demographic, social, and technological factors. The research observed that the economic environment is most important through the effects it exerts on the bargaining power held by labour and management. Bargaining power is heavily influenced by strike leverage and the extent to which an increase in wages leads to a decline in employment called the wage-employment trade-off. Important economic factors include those that operate at the firm level, called the microeconomic influences, and the state of the labour market and the overall economy, called the macroeconomic influences.

Public policy shapes the right of the parties and the procedures used in collective bargaining. There has long been a strong preference in the labour laws that give employees, unions, and management the right to directly shape employment terms with limited interference from the government. Major demographic issues include the increased labour force participation of women that has occurred after World War II. The labour force is becoming more diverse and unions face a challenge in altering their policies to increase their appeal to the new workers. The public continues to express support for the general purposes served by unions. Technology influences employment levels and bargaining leverage. In recent years there has been much debate over how technology is affecting worker skill levels. On the shop floor labour relations play an important role in shaping how well new technology is implemented. How well collective bargaining serves the interests of labour and management often depends on its ability to adapt to changes in the environment. There are also pressures from other key environmental dimensions such as nonunion competition, international competition, union image problems, and signs of innovation in the labour movement.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends the following:

1. Public policy should determine how unions should be formed and sustain themselves.
2. Collective bargaining should continually turn disagreements into agreements in an orderly fashion.
3. Collective bargaining should be established by negotiations and discussion of agreement on matters of mutual concern to employers and unions covering the employment relationship, and terms and conditions of employment.
4. Collective bargaining should be seen as exchange relationship in which wage-work bargains take place between employers and employees through the agency of a trade union.
5. Laws such as pensions and equal employment opportunity rights should directly influence particular employment conditions.
6. Public should continue to express support for the general purposes served by unions.
7. Collective bargaining should serve the interests of labour and management.
8. Shop floor labour relations should play an important role in shaping how well new technology is implemented.

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