

## Post-consolidation Challenges and Strategies for Managing Employees' Resistance to Change in the Banking Sector in Nigeria

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**ABSTRACT** To tackle the problems bedeviling the banking sector in Nigeria and restore depositors confidence in the sector, the Central Bank on July 6, 2004 mandated all 89 banks to recapitalize to the tune of N25 billion on or before the December 31, 2005. Most of twenty-five group banks which met this requirement within the stipulated time frame did so through merger and acquisition with varying implications and challenges for employees and their banks such as closure of weak and non-consolidation banks, job losses, poaching, intra wage disparity and employee low commitment to work in post-consolidated banks. Against this backdrop employees in the sector have resorted to active and passive resistance to protest and resist job losses and other negative implications of consolidation. Situating consolidation and employee resistance within the context of neo-liberal and neo-Marxist theory respectively, this paper argues that employees' resistance is a passionate protest against capital encroachment and onslaught on their means of survival. The paper therefore suggested some strategies that may be used to overcoming employees' resistance to changes sweeping across the financial sub-sector in the post-consolidation era in Nigeria.

### INTRODUCTION

The period of consolidation in the banking sub-sector in Nigeria (July 2004–December 2005) was a period of change that created anxiety and concerns for employees in the banks. This is because on the long run they are at the receiving end. To many employees, the news of consolidation of banking sub-sector to the tune of N25 billion may have been greeted with apprehension. Consolidation which took the form of merger and acquisition involved, downsizing, retrenchment, rationalisation, cost reduction programme, etc. to enable the banks to remain afloat. For instance, a merger of one firm with another firm may likely create duplication. The management may decide that instead of operating from two separate locations which are geographically so close it will be economically wise to shut down some branches. Further, some banks that went to Stock Exchange to source funds, relegated the welfare and working conditions of workers to the background, while gearing all its efforts towards attracting any available funds they could muster to meet the target and deadline (Akanbi and Oso 2005; Olaosebikan 2006). This situation created some problems between management and employees' union thereby making industrial relations in such banks a difficult and precarious one. It was on

the basis of this situation that some management of the banks became more authoritative in the pretense of managing the change brought about by consolidation. It was inevitable that employees as individuals and trade union as a group had to react in their respective ways to resist the anti-democratic forces in the organization and secure their jobs as well as those benefits attached to their jobs (Adeluyi 2004; Omokhodion 2007).

In achieving the objective of bank consolidation, quite a number of risk factors were involved both during and after consolidation which have implications for industrial relations in the banking sector. The human risk factors included; downplaying of employees welfare in merger and acquisition, dealing with employee resistance to change under the new reality, loss of job commitment, redundancy, and employee turnover with concomitant loss of key talents, treating human capital as cost, imbalance pay setting and post merger fits (Ugbaka 2004; Adeyemi 2005; Omokhodion 2007).

Though consolidation has since been concluded in the banking sector with its attendant consequences, however, there has been no real academic effort to critically appraise how employees are reacting, adapting and coping with the new realities in the post-consolidation era as well as how to manage their reactions and resistance to changes in the banking sector in Nigeria.

### **Problems of Nigerian Banking Sector and the Need for Consolidation**

There was a near consensus that certain prevailing factors abound in the Nigerian banking industry as at May 29, 1999 to justify the call for an overhaul of the sector in readiness for full blown reforms in the finance sector. The banking sector was one of the most vulnerable to a harvest of ruinous policies of successive military administrations (Odunuga 2004; Akanbi and Oso 2005; Olaosebikan 2006). As at end-June 2004, there were 89 deposit money banks operating in Nigeria, comprising of institutions of various sizes and degree of soundness. In terms of structure, the sector was highly concentrated, as the 10 largest banks accounted for about 50 percent of the industry's total assets/liabilities (ILO 2004).

It was a period when most banks in the country had capitalization of less than \$10 million. Even the largest bank in Nigeria had a capital base of about \$240m compared with \$526m for the smallest bank in Malaysia during the period under review. The small size of most of the banks, each with expensive headquarters, separate investments in software and hardware, heavy fixed cost and operating expenses, and with bunching of branches in few commercial centres led to high average costs for the industry (Akanbi 2005; Okwe 2006).

This, in turn, had implications for the cost of intermediation and the spread between deposit and lending rates. It also put undue pressure on banks to engage in sharp practices as means of survival. In essence, some of the banks were not engaging in strict banking business in terms of financial intermediation. They were merely traders - trading in foreign exchange, in government treasury bills and sometimes, in direct importation of goods through 'shell companies' (Akanbi and Oso 2005).

Specifically, as at the end - March, 2004, the Central Bank of Nigeria's (CBN) rating of all the banks, classified 62 as sound/satisfactory, 14 as marginal and 11 as unsound. Two of the banks did not render any returns during the period. The CBN said the weakness of some of the ailing banks manifests in their overdrawn position with the CBN, high incidence of non performing loans, capital deficiencies, weak management and poor corporate governance. A further analysis of the returns of the marginal and unsound banks as at 2005 revealed that they accounted for 19.2percent

of total assets of the banking system and 17.2 percent of total deposit liabilities. The industry's non-performing assets accounted for 19.5 percent (Adeluyi 2004; Olajide 2006a; Omoh 2006).

The problem of the banks, particularly those classified as unsound, included; persistent illiquidity, poor assets quality and unprofitable operations, weak corporate governance evidenced by high turnover in the board and management staff, inaccurate reporting and non-compliance with regulatory requirements, falling ethics and de-marketing of other banks in the industry and late or non-publication of annual accounts. Others are gross insider related credits; insolvency as evidenced by negative capital adequacy ratios and shareholders' funds that had been completely eroded by operating losses; weak capital base; over-dependency on public sector deposits, and neglect of small and medium class savers (Onuorah 2004; Akanbi et al. 2007).

To meet up with the ₦ 25bn minimum capital requirement of the CBN, some windows of opportunity were open to the then 89 banks. These included; mergers, acquisition and the opportunity to raise funds from the capital market. Most of the banks opted for Merger and Acquisition (M&A).

A merger occurs when two or more companies transfer their business and assets to a new company (or to one of themselves) and in consideration, their members receive shares in the transferee company. Section 590 of the Companies and Allied Matters Act 1990 (hereinafter referred to as CAMA) defines mergers as "any amalgamation of the undertakings or any part of the undertakings or part of the undertakings of one or more companies and one or more bodies corporate". An underlining string in merger is that shareholders of the merging companies are substantially the shareholders in the offspring of the union. On the other hand, an acquisition occurs when one company acquires sufficient shares in another company so as to give it control of that company. The shareholders of the acquired company are paid off and the acquirer becomes owner of all or a substantial part of the assets of the acquired company (Akamiokhor 1989).

At the expiration of the consolidation on the 31<sup>st</sup> December 2005, only twenty banks emerged largely through Merger and Acquisition as shown below.

**Table 1: State of consolidated banks and acquisition group's capital base as at 31 December, 2005**

<i>Name of bank and acquisition group</i>	<i>Capital Base (N) Billion</i>
1. <b>Access Bank</b> -Access Bank -Capital Bank Int'l -Marina Bank	28
2. <b>AfriBank</b> -AfriBank Int'l (Merchant) Bank -AfriBank of Nigeria	29
3. <b>Diamond Bank</b> -Africa Int'l Bank -Diamond Bank -Lion Bank -Prudent Bank -Reliance Bank	33.25
4. <b>Ecobank Nigeria</b> None -Citizen Bank Int'l -Fountain Trust Bank -Guardian Express Bank -Omega Bank -Trans Int'l Bank	Over 25
5. <b>Equitorial Trust Bank</b> -Devcom Bank -Equatorial Trust Bank	26.5
6. <b>Fidelity Bank</b> -Fidelity Bank -FSB Int'l -Manny Bank	29
7. <b>First Bank of Nig. Plc</b> -FBN(Merchant Bankers) Ltd -First Bank of Nigeria -MBC Int'l Bank -NBM Bank Ltd -Trust Bank of Africa	44.67
8. <b>First City Monument Bank</b> -Co-operative Development Bank -MIDAS Merchant Bank -Nigeria-America Merchant Bank -First City Monument Bank	30
9. <b>First Inland Bank Plc</b> -First Atlantic Bank -Int'l Merchant Bank(IMB) -Inland Bank -NUB	30
10. <b>Guaranty Trust Bank Plc</b> None	34
11. <b>Platinum- Habib Bank Plc</b> -Habib Nigeria Bank -Platinum Bank	25
12. <b>IBTC Chartered Bank Plc</b> -Chartered Bank -IBTC Ltd -Regent Bank	35
13. <b>Intercontinental Bank Plc</b> -Equity Bank of Nigeria -Gateway Bank of Nigeria -Global Bank -Intercontinental Bank	51
14. <b>NIB Ltd (Citi Group)</b> None	25

**Table 1: Contd....**

<i>Name of bank and acquisition group</i>	<i>Capital Base (N) Billion</i>
15. <b>Oceanic Bank Int'l</b> -International Trust Bank -Oceanic Bank	31
16. <b>Sykebank</b> - Bonk Bank - Cooperative Bank - EIB Int'l Bank	37.7
17. <b>Springbank Plc</b> - ACB Int'l Bank	27
18. <b>Stanbic Bank Nig. Ltd</b> None	25
19. <b>Standard Chartered Bank</b> None	26
20. <b>Sterling Bank Plc</b> -Indo-Nig. Bank -Magnum Trust Bank -NAL Bank	25
21. <b>Union Bank</b> -Union Bank Plc -Union Merchant Bank -Universal Trust Bank	58
22. <b>United Bank of Africa</b> -Continental Trust Bank -Standard Trust Bank -United Bank of Africa	50
23. <b>Unity Bank</b> -Bank of the North -Centrepont Bank -First Interstate Bank -Intercity Bank -New Africa Bank -NNB Int'l Bank -Pacific Bank -Societe Bancaire Nig. Bank -Tropical Commerce Bank	30
24. <b>Wema Bank</b> -National Bank of Nigeria -Wema Bank	35
25. <b>Zenith Bank</b> None	38

Source: Central Bank of Nigeria (2006)

It is pertinent to note that the successful consolidation of the above mentioned bank led to liquidation of 13 non-consolidated banks thereby making them to wind up their operations and their operating licenses subsequently revoked. These banks included; *Hallmark Bank, Trade Bank, African International Bank, Societe Generale Bank, Fortune Bank, Liberty Bank, Triumph Bank, African Express Bank (Afex), Eagle Bank, Metropolitan Bank, City Express Bank and Gulf Bank* (CBN 2006).

### **Post-Consolidation Challenges and Employees Patterns of Resistance**

Consolidation of the banking sector has

resulted into some gains and challenges in the post consolidated era. On the gains side, it is instructive to state that as a result of consolidation several gains have been recorded in the banking sector. For instance, the aggregate capital base of the banks which stood at N384 billion before consolidation has notched up to N768 billion. In addition, foreign direct investments have also gone up. In this respect, \$500 million represent largely the foreign capital that came in through those banks that brought in offshore financiers in the consolidation process. Even in the post-consolidation period there doesn't seem to be ceiling on such funds yet (Oyewale et al. 2006).

Another gain of consolidation is the institution of better corporate governance and professionalism. This is considered gain because corporate governance codes which are good for the banking industry that suffered several years of abuse and neglect to larger extent have been restored. Prior to consolidation, operators in the banking sector seemed not to think that banking demands circumspection and adherence to rules (Oyewale and Tokede 2006).

In spite of these nuggets of success coming out of the consolidation of banks, several challenges in the area of integration, lending, survival and future of the various mergers are parts of the technical and professional challenges in the sector. In the areas of integration, banks are finding it quite difficult to integrate disparate cultures, information technology processes and systems and staff harmonisation. Many banks that merged in the area of integration are spurious. Banks that came out of the consolidation programme as a result of mergers are particularly finding it difficult to achieve seamless integration of their various identities. Several banks in the post-consolidation era are in this dilemma and are yet to solve this problem successfully. The implication of this is that transactions cannot be done online real time and customers have been subjected to delays, sometimes outright denials when making transactions (Oyewale et al. 2006).

Again, partly because of the ambiguity of the reforms policies and in a bid to remain relevant, some banks committed their organizations into merger arrangements that could not stand the test of time. The reality is that most of such arrangements collapsed some few years after as evidenced in the case of *Spring Bank* where the rallying together of organizations with different focus and conflicting interests, unarguably set

directors against themselves (Akanbi et al. 2007; Omokhodion 2007).

The greatest human resource challenge facing consolidated banks are on the issues of employees' remuneration, staff harmonisation and placement and job security in the banks. Reports on banks in the post-consolidation period showed that management and workers union on several occasions spoilt for war wage reviews. These agitations are based on the enhanced liquidity of the banks as result of consolidation. Besides, bank employees are worried that development in the telecommunications sector are driving their profession to the third most lucrative in the economy coming after the oil and telecommunications. Agitations for wage reviews are persistent in smaller banks that are paying competitive salaries to their workers. However, even some old generation banks are not insulated from this agitation. Infact the latter are worried that many of its experienced hands are drifting to well established, new high-paying banks. Related to this is the rapid depletion and poaching of trained bankers into the telecommunications sector. This has created acute shortage of Information Technology (IT) professionals and experience managers in the banks (Osaze 2006; Oyewale et al. 2006).

In many banks the changes in placements have resulted into serious job cuts and rationalisation in both consolidated and non-consolidated banks. This only serves to make bankers regards their jobs as unstable. Job cuts are continuous in the banking sector and this has the tendency to make employees less committed to their jobs as well accentuate the already worsen labour turnover in the sector (Fanim 2006). For instance, the thirteen non-consolidated banks listed earlier had been dissolved and their operating licenses withdrawn. The implication here is that all their employees had lost their jobs. The number of those who lost their job as a result consolidation of banks was put at 45,000 employees involving all categories and cadres. This may be considered high in an economy in which labour market is saturated and graduate unemployment situation has remained very critical (National Planning Commission 2004; Fanim 2006).

Besides those employees who lost their jobs in the thirteen non-consolidated banks whose operating licences have been withdrawn by the Central Bank, there were and still job losses even

in those banks that consolidated either through Merger or Acquisition. For instance, specifically in the Sykebank (in which seven banks merged) more than 320 employees had been laid off since February, 2006 (Fanimu 2006). In addition, in IBTC-Chartered Bank (in which two Banks merged) 117 employees had been laid off. Moreover, in the Wema Bank (in which Wema Bank acquired the National Bank), 450 employees were laid off. Also in Union bank (in which Union Bank acquired Universal Trust Bank, UTB) 500 employees have been laid off and 224 retired (Egene 2006; Oritse and Ekwujuru 2006). In addition, in Springbank 300 employees have been retrenched while Afribank had sacked and retired 385 employees combined (Adetunji 2006; Oke 2006). All these were done with the main objective to restructure and cut down employee costs.

Assessing the spate of retrenchment and job losses in the banking sector, in the post-consolidation period, the former President-General of Trade Union Congress (TUC) said:

*In the banking industry the congress is worried about the retrenchment galore in the banking industry occasioned by the post-consolidation of banking...the exercise is unnecessary, unjustified and causing more miseries to homes. We therefore call on employers of labour in the consolidated banks to exercise caution and stop the retrenchment fever in the banks (Okhomina 2006:7).*

Also assessing critically recent job losses and the climate of industrial relations in the banking sector, in the post-consolidation era, Olaosebikan (2006: 29) stated:

*...the employer-employee relations in the banking industry has been the worst...banks attracted people into their organizations with fat salaries only to destroy and ravaged their intellect. First class graduates were turned into zombie by these banks within a few years of employment. The bank made them embrace unsustainable and expensive life style and believed that the only thing that mattered was money. The staff were used and dumped at will without a care for them and the families they supported. Once a woman in their employment was married, she was as good as having lost her job. Even now most of the employees come to work each day unsure if they still had a job.*

The main idea to be drawn from above assertions is that job losses in the post-consolidation era in the banking sector in Nigeria is a reality.

This reality according to Alo (2005) has implications for engendering employee resistance in the sector. He argued that employee resistance in this period of change may manifest in several ways such as through subtle unwillingness to share tangible resources, information and knowledge and unwillingness to adjust to organizational process. He also argued that employee resistance may also be in form of unwillingness to allocate time and energy to critical integration activities besides other general resistance to changes required by Merger and Acquisition blueprint.

Another challenge of post-consolidation in the banking sector which has become widespread is the loss of job commitment. The argument here is that post-consolidation period has been characterised by heightened anxieties on the part of the employees over their fate and the fate of their organizations. Therefore, it is a commonplace to find bank employees falling victims of unfounded rumours and fears of job loss, a situation that has been aggravated by conflicting and incoherent messages on the part of management and personality clashes. All these are carried over to post-consolidation period and manifest themselves in form of dampened morale and demotivation, downturn in productivity, precipitous resignation, damage to corporate image, wrong signals to (prospective) investors and customers, reduction in revenue and weakened competitive advantage (Olajide 2006b; Osaze 2006; Omokhodion 2007).

Further, in order to reduce cost, particularly training cost, some banks have resorted to casualization. In Nigeria, casualization is the modern slavery of which bank, oil and gas and telecommunications sectors are the greatest culprits. These industries shy away from employing staff on a permanent basis owing to their non-readiness to pay staff residual benefits (Okougbo 2004; Ojewale et al. 2006; Akanbi and Olesin 2007).

Further, another human resource challenge in the post-consolidation era in the banking sector is that there is some degree of wage disparity between the professionals who retained their position in the old set up, and the new employees who enjoyed higher pay status in their liquidated banks. The inability of the management to harmonize pay structure between these employees has breached industrial peace. The employees affected by the wage reduction were

found to have reduced their productivity because they found themselves carrying out similar job description with new employees from acquired bank who had negotiated their pay through individual bargaining. Such problems emanated within the structures of Union Bank and Oceanic Bank as the two banks retained original names after the acquisitions of other banks into the fold. The case of Unity Bank is exemplary because even though the former NNB International Bank remains the most prominent in the merger, no employee of the bank claimed to belong to an old bank as in the case of the other two mentioned previously (i.e. Union bank and Oceanic bank) (Akpan 2007).

Against the backdrop of the above human resource challenges it is expected that employees in the banking sector would be reacting and resisting the changes that threatened their jobs and diminish their bargaining powers. According to Soley (1989); Otobo (1994); Onyeonoru (2004) and Okafor and Bode-Okunade (2005) when employees are faced with precarious situations that threatened their jobs and means of livelihood, they are likely to adopt various measures to protest and resist such changes. Consequently, the pattern of employees' resistance in the post-consolidation era in Nigeria could be categorized into two major types. These are;

### **Active Resistance**

This is active opposition to a change. Active resistance to change may be as a result of perceived threat to job security or interest on the part of workers, rumours, real or imagined fears, misconception, problem of poor communication between the management and workers. This invariably could lead to frustration, aggression, resignation, picketing, strike action and all kinds of labour protests and resistance. According to the scholars mentioned above, strike is the most obvious form of active resistance by the workers in Nigeria. Strike may be official or unofficial, constitutional or unconstitutional, demonstrations, work stoppages, sympathy strike, work-to-rule, go slow and sit-down strike. Strike is a common avenue for labour protest in Nigeria. When nationwide strike occurs, besides the Central Bank, all other banks are usually closed (Okere 2005; Ojewale 2006). In the period post-consolidation this form of resistance is common in those banks with unionized workforce. For

instance, in some few banks, especially old generation banks, their employees under the trade union - National Union of Banks, Insurance and Financial Institutions Employees (NUBIFE) has embarked on industrial action to protest job cuts and other forms of poor working conditions going on in the sector in the post-consolidation period. In addition, the central labour body, the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC), has on number of occasions picketed some new and old generation banks that have laid off their employees as well those wishing to do so (Oritse and Ekwurujuru 2006; Ojeme 2006).

In anticipation that continuous labour protests may derail the operations in the newly consolidated banks, the federal government early in the month of April (2006) sent a bill to the National Assembly wishing to proscribe trade union activities that utilise the strike option as means of resisting obnoxious policies and practices and defend their jobs in the banking sector in the post-consolidation era. The bill also proposed jail terms of between six months and five years for any unionist "engaging in acts calculated to disrupt the economy". Section 41(1) of the proposed bill, stated that the President, may by an order published in the government gazette, proscribe a bank's trade union that opts for strike, which would then cease to exist from the date of the order. The bill further stated that "no person who immediately before the date of an order under this section was an officer of a proscribed union, shall at any time after that date be a officer of any trade union, any of the member of which are employed by bank". It also prescribes a fine of N5000 or imprisonment for six months or both for failure of any unionist to surrender the certificate of the union (Akintunde and Isine 2006: 60).

### **Passive Resistance**

This is a mild level of resistance to change. In this case an employee becomes less committed to the goals and objectives of the organization. He or she does not take any action or initiative that will advance the interest of the organization. He or she does only that the rules say he/ she should do. This type of resistance is common in work organizations where employees are not unionized (Otobo 1994, 2000; Okafor and Bode-Okunade 2005).

In Nigeria most new generation banks do not

allow their employees to unionize. Hence, this type of resistance is very common in those banks. Passive resistance can be of two types namely; indifference, on one hand and on the other, deliberate sabotage. Indifference occurs when an employee decides to sit on the fence. He or she neither gets involved nor oppose the change. However, he or she would not be bothered whether there is a change or not. An employee who adopts this kind of behaviour in an organization is apathetic and often less committed to the goals of the bank. Deliberate sabotage on the other hand, is another behavioural reaction to changes in work organization. This is where the employees concerned are aware of the changes process but deliberately obstructing the path of progress. This is usually the case when employees are not included in the process of change, where management takes certain vital decisions relating to employees jobs unilaterally and without consultation and imposing them on the employees. Passive resistance is subtle but very dangerous in the banking sector because they are not often obvious. Passive resistance among non-unionized bank employees in post-consolidation era has become very common (Oritse and Ekujuru 2006).

#### **Theoretical Context of Employee Resistance in Post-consolidation Period**

The theoretical perspective of consolidation in the banking sector is premised on Neo-liberalism while workers resistance is premised on neo-Marxist theory. Neo-liberalism is a socio-economic ideology that prescribes the rule of market forces, primacy of individual, freedom from restraints (especially by government) in all economic activities, that is, private ownership rights (Adenugba 2006).

Neo-liberalism developed from liberalism and 'neo' stands for new. Neo-liberalism is against the state intervention and the entire notion of state regulation and state economic policy making. Neo-liberals see the nation state as an economic unit competing with education, health, etc. According to Okafor (2005: 43), 'in economic terms the state is part of the problem, not the solution'. There is no possibility to justify any activity of the state that is more than a predefined minimum amount in neo-liberal theory. This means a guarantee of totally equal opportunities, protection of the individual, protection of the

individual, prevention of discrimination and assurance of necessary frame conditions of free markets. These prescriptions of neo-liberalism and globalization do not differ. The neo-liberals propagate the same concept in which the main focus is "free trade". The neo-liberalists are known as the profunder of the policies of IMF and World Bank imposed on debtor nations through Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) and its conditionalities. These conditionalities are the same as the policies of neo-liberalism and economic globalization of which consolidation of bank is an integral part.

Also, because workers in all sectors of the economy are central to the production process no matter how technologically developed, they are affected by the policies, which do not have their interests in focus. The adoption of the IMF and World Bank variant of SAP and its conditionalities put Nigerian bank employees at the mercy of the post-consolidation operations. The effects of neo-liberal reforms such as consolidation impede bank employees' job security and their welfare. Other conditionalities which include privatisation, trade and capital liberalisation, deregulation, and removal of subsidies, are similar to components of economic globalization, which is also a neo-liberal ideology (Adewumi 2001; Oshiomole 2001).

Within the context of neo-liberalism, Adewumi (2001) opines that the various phases of development of world capitalism, which constantly undergo their own crises, throw up different challenges that impact negatively on workers and their work organizations. He argues further that the latest phase christened economic globalization (which precipitated consolidation of the banking sector) constitutes the most potent threat to the well being of developing countries in general and the working people in particular. The most critical challenges of economic globalization emanate from all aspects of economic globalization, which include trade liberalisation, consolidation, capital liberalization, and macro-economic policies of the international financial institutions.

Furthermore, as regards workers resistance, neo-Marxist theory argues that the production of material life is both objectively determined and subjectively created. Objective, because material life is shaped by prevailing nature of economy, and subjective, because production and reproduction of material life occurs within specific

and definite social relations. Man is an active determinant of social life and at the same time restricted by prevailing nature of economy. A conscious creator of society, he is also its creature (Ritzer 1996). Through his activity, man transforms nature, thereby objectifying himself. This process of creating society is but a part of the general process of externalisation, of self actualisation.

This objectification does not presuppose that natural object exists outside of man, but inside him as needs with corresponding powers to realize them. To appropriate nature is to confirm man's needs because in essence, man is natural. Nature here is simply an extension of man presenting himself with numerous possibilities to confirm his being as man, given prevailing conditions. In a society widely pervaded by unemployment, job losses, retrenchment, saturated labour market engendered by economic globalization such that exist in Nigeria, the organic link between man and nature becomes blurred (Okafor and Bode-Okunade 2005). Hence, work i.e. objectification, - becomes a compulsion, for autonomous activity is distorted by relations of exploitation and deprivation. Life for employees in this situation could be dehumanizing, a process of accumulation of wealth by few on one hand, and on the other, deprivation for majority (Ritzer 1996).

Under the deplorable economic and social conditions, every activity including work/job seems to have become repetitive, monotonous and instrumental (Marcuse 1972). The greater an employee participates in productive activities, the greater the dehumanization, deprivation and uncertainty about his job. Dehumanization in this sense may not be conscious but it generates specific character traits that enables an employee not only to subjectively define his objective economic situation, but also to act according to what is necessary for him from a practical standpoint and give him 'satisfaction' from his activities and stay on in his job (Okafor 2005). Employees' protests and resistance in post-consolidation period in banking sector in Nigeria may differ from one bank to another but they all rest on the prevailing objective social and economic conditions these employees found themselves. Consequently, if prevailing conditions define a general social character from which specific employees' characters take cues 'that social character internalises external necessities and harnesses energy for the task of a given economic and social system' (Fromm 1965: 41).

Exerting oneself at work is not only one of a number of socially sanctioned 'tasks which enable people to make a living within the environment in which they find themselves' (Watson 1980:112), it has, in the post-consolidation era, become an instrumental social activity, which because of uncertainty about their job, to some bank workers, may not constitute worthwhile and meaningful behaviour. But since protests and other forms of resistance against post-consolidation job losses appear as solutions in bridging the gap between the expectations of employees from their jobs and the present reality, then their commitment to their jobs may become concealed as the two move further apart.

The adoption of various means of protests and resistance is neither a remedy to their problem nor is it exclusive identification of threatened post consolidated bank employees, rather it rests on the fact that protests and resistance may have encapsulated the employees' attitude and behaviour at work only to themselves as the means of rejecting the negative consequences associated with consolidation in the sector. In this way, therefore, absenteeism, truancy, low performance and productivity, strike action, etc, which have characterized various post consolidated banks are presented as purely organizational problems even though their origins are social (Akpan 2007).

Various forms of protests and resistance define the parameters of, and bank workers' conceptions of their work, they are also significant entities through which workers' level of work commitment and productivity are measured. Though these protests and resistance affect employees commitment and productivity adversely, at the same time they appear as a means of coping with the dehumanizing conditions in the sector. That most employees in the post-consolidation period are protesting and resisting the adverse impact of consolidation in their banks attest to the subtle and growing level of dehumanization of bank employees in Nigeria. In the final analysis these protests and resistance are only the by-products of the repercussions of economic globalization's marginalization of bank employees.

### **Strategies for Managing Workers Resistance in Post-Consolidation Era**

It is important to note that while post-consolidation adjustments continue to make

inroad into virtually all consolidated banks, employees' resistance to changes and adjustment may not be completely done way with, however, they may be reduced. Some of the proposed strategies to be adopted to achieve this include;

- 1 **Regular Consultations, Bargaining and Dialogue with Employees:** Consultation, bargaining and dialogue are most potent ways of managing employees in the period of rapid change as being witnessed in the larger society under the current economic and political dispensation. It should be recalled that democracy as a system of government in the wider society encourages consultation, open communication and dialogue. This should be allowed to permeate into the workplace in form of industrial democracy. Management of various banks should make it a point of duty to consult, bargain and dialogue with their employees from time to time on pertinent issues relating to human resource problems. Where trade unions exist the institution of collective bargaining should be utilized and collective agreement to be reached must be respected by all the parties concerned in order to enlist employees' job commitment and confidence in order to create healthy industrial relations environment.
- 1 **Training and Development:** Training and development are one of the most important aspects in the management of people at work. Training improves skills, quality and enhances employees' performance and creates a more conducive atmosphere in the workplace. Training and development usually entail the introduction of new methods, procedures, and techniques of doing things. If the employees are well trained on any new methods and technique of doing things, the employees' are likely to accept new changes and challenges. Nevertheless, training and development should be a continuous process. In a nutshell all efforts must be made to upgrade bank employees' skills, knowledge and expertise periodically to make them fit into the new changes and tackle challenges taking place in the post-consolidation period.
- 1 **Setting Clear Objectives:** Corporate objectives should be very clear and unambiguous. The employees in the consolidated banks should be in the picture as to the direction and vision of the bank. Although it is the prerogative of top management to

formulate objectives and take vital decisions, but there should be a way of involving the employees since they are the ones mostly involved in implementing the objectives and decisions. In other words the employees who are going to be affected by certain decisions should be involved in the objective and decision formulation process in one way or the other.

- 1 **Gradual Introduction of Change:** Post-consolidation period in the banking sector requires a lot of integration of technologies and operations. Against this background changes should be gradual to give new and old employees room for personal adjustments and adaptation. Enough time should be allowed for the complete shift and integration of the technologies of merging banks to allay the fears, anxieties and panic that will grip the employees who are not so vast in the area of Information Technology (IT) and whom are most likely to resist (passively) the new methods and techniques.
- 1 **Continuous Education:** There is the need for continuous education and enlightenment of all categories of bank employees on the advantages and disadvantages of changes that accompanied bank consolidation. Emphasis on the advantages should outweigh the disadvantages to enable the employees not only to come to terms with the realities of the modern times but also to understand and appreciate the new methods involved in post-consolidation. Educating the employees properly will eliminate mistrust, suspicion, acrimonies, fears amongst others, thereby reducing the incidence of sabotage as well as active and passive resistance to change. Bank employees should be educated on how consolidation would lead to increased employee satisfaction, performance and productivity and more importantly better working and living conditions both within and outside the work environment.
- 1 **Involvement of the Employees in Decision Making:** The views and opinions of the bank employees who constitute the larger part of the organization should be sought on pertinent human resource issues whenever possible. They should from time to time be involved in making certain decisions that affect their own jobs either directly or through their trade unions. This calls for not only

industrial democracy but also decentralization of decision making process and open communication between the management and their employees. The employees should be allowed to express their views or opinions freely without being intimidated. Management should also be a good listener and should show good understanding and sympathize with employees' fears and expectations especially as regards job losses in the post-consolidation period.

- 1 **Identify Group leaders:** This strategy is very useful in unionized banks. It is important to identify and recognize the opinions leaders or union leaders of a group and concentrate the persuasion on them. Further, there is the need for management to educate them and volunteer information to them in order to turn them from agitators to 'good teachers' to their group members. Management in the post-consolidation period should also try 'to sell' the desired changes to this main group by appealing to them to educate their members too on the prospects and challenges of consolidation as well the gains they stand to benefit. Attempts should also be made to alleviate the employees' fear so that rumour mongering would be reduced drastically.

### CONCLUSION

Managing employees' resistance to changes in the post-consolidation era in the banking sector is a real challenge to management because it bothers on the employees' survival and their job security, however, it is not impossible. No doubt, changes and challenges associated with bank consolidation will continue to reshape the banks' business operations, however, dynamic ones will continue to extend their frontiers in line with the demands of the economic environment. This calls for broad minded, employee-friendly, responsive and proactive management that will have the capacity to conceptualize, synthesize and cope with ideas and changes through sustained intellectual efforts and flexibility in order to manage employees' resistance to change in the post-consolidation era.

With bank consolidation completed, changes in the banking sector appear to be on a very fast lane and to adapt to such changes the management must develop managerial confidence and capability to sense, articulate and implement

employee-friendly policies and programmes that would stabilize the work environment and foster good industrial relations. As already emphasized, the most important factor in carrying this out is the "employees". They are the ones that can forestall the turning of minor irritants and problems into major catastrophic ones. Restive employees if effectively managed and reassured could provide an inexhaustible treasure of ideas and innovations. Therefore the management of consolidated banks should at all times pursue with vigour the training and re-training of this vital component and important asset – the employees – in line with the demands of the operating environment.

As government economic reform agenda continue to unfold, the future presents a lot of challenges to all the consolidated banks in the country and management will continue to assume more and more responsibilities for social aspects of the working environment. In this period of post-consolidation in the banking sector employees must be part and parcel of new methods and techniques for their banks to remain relevant and afloat. With this it is expected that the workforce - individually and collectively - will be a portent agent of change rather than obstacle to change.

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