

Application of the System Model of Industrial Relations in A Leading Manufacturing Organization in Bangladesh*

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ABSTRACT

John Dunlop's System Model of Industrial Relations, developed in the 1950s, is one of the prominent theories in organizational/industrial sociology. This theory considers industrial relations as a social system combining several sub-systems. An attempt has been made for the first time to examine the implications of this theory with a view to analyzing the working environment in Walton-a leading manufacturing organization in Bangladesh. Starting its operation in 1977 as a small-scale enterprise, Walton currently captures a big slice of the domestic market and is also extending its operation to international markets. The study is based on the five testable components of industrial relations including government/actor, technology, ideology, market and power. Questionnaires were developed to collect data from the respondents in different departments of the organization through random sampling. The results confirm that the Dunlop approach works in a befitting manner in most cases in Walton. The findings bear important lessons in the field of industrial sociology. The theory remains relevant even today in the sphere of employee relations.

Keywords: Dunlop, System approach, Industrial Relations, Walton, Bangladesh.

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INTRODUCTION

Industrial Relations represent a dual commitment between labor and management for the attainment of common goals through a consultative process. Harmonious IR spur productivity in the whole industrialization process. Constant review of industrial relations adds value in cementing the bond between management and the workforce that plays a catalytic role in industries (Premalatha 2012; Pulignano, Carrieri & Baccaro 2018). Wage determination and the process of human capital formation are the two most important features of industrial relations (Faruque 2009; Thakur 2019). The level of confidence also plays a crucial role in

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harmonious industrial relations (Dixit & Sharma 2015). Moreover, mutual confidence developed from the recognition of employee goodwill and employer integrity in day-to-day activities is crucial to industrial relations (D'souza 2018). Healthy industrial relations are embedded in an inclusive labor policy with elements such as freedom from fear, full security of employment and freedom of want (Schmid 2019; Cox & Blake 1991). Economic, technological, and institutional factors also shape industrial relations and play a prominent role in a labor-intensive country like Bangladesh where wages are often below the standard norm. The problem is compounded by a relatively high unemployment rate, capitalist entrepreneurs, weak and often moribund trade unions, weak legal frameworks, and poor democratic norms in industrial undertakings. Again, collective bargaining agents in the industry invalidate many important welfare issues in the industrial relations in Bangladesh (Ahmad 2014; Khan & Taher 2018). Enabling industrial relations depends on the cooperative and constructive attitudes of both parties (management and union) where the government should play only a catalytic agent role in harnessing trust and confidence in the process.

Walton, operating since 1977, is the first complete manufacturer and innovative Bangladeshi organization in the electrical and electronics sector. Along the way, it has become one of the most trusted and prestigious brands in Bangladesh with extensive national and international market coverage. In the domestic market, it has more than 13 000 Points of Sale (POS) operated in different forms of distribution channels such as Walton Plaza, Walton E-Plaza, exclusive distributors, dealers, sub-dealers, corporate sales, international business unit, original design manufacturer, original equipment manufacturer and so on. Walton is currently making waves in foreign markets, spanning across 40 countries in Europe, North America, Asia, West Africa, and more. Most importantly, the company is catering to more than 30000 workforce in 22 production units. Walton has been maintaining full compliances since its inception, and certified and accredited by various national and international standard agencies such as ISO, BSTI, UKAS, SASO, CE, and OHSAS, amongst others (Walton 2025).

This paper is the first attempt to apply John Dunlop's industrial relations system approach in Bangladesh. Walton has been used as a case for application of the theory. It also aims to delineate the salient features of Dunlop's industrial relations system for peaceful industrial relations through some policy implications and future research directions.

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System Approach

Sociologist John Dunlop's (1958) system theory is a necessary starting point for analysing industrial relations. Dunlop's system theory was published in his book titled "Industrial Relations Systems". Dunlop's systems theory, based on the ideological framework of the sociological theory of social systems of Talcott Parsons, is an inclusive approach developed through maintaining a radical departure from previous writers on industrial relations who were more descriptive than analytical (Johnnie 1992; Rogowski 2000). Until now, this work has been the most influential in the field of industrial relations (Anyim, Ikemefuna & Ekwoaba 2012; Ahammad, Naim, Rashedul & Roy 2017; Hernaus, Pavlovic & Klindzic 2019). It describes 'industrial relations' as a subsystem of the total social systems parallel to, but different from economic and political systems (Singh 2012).

According to Dunlop (1958), the key essence of any theory of industrial relations is to explain the establishment of rules in a specific industrial relations system and the ways they change and affect the system. At the policy level, rules are made by the government. At the company level, rules are made by the top management (Lee 1996). The rulemaking system in industrial relations is very critical with reference to addressing the labor issues such as arbitration, administration, grievance procedure, discipline, and discharge (Bemmels & Foley 1996). There are three groups of actors in every industrial relations system including the workers, the managers and the governmental agencies concerned with the working community (Dunlop 1958). The whole industrial relationships take place in several interrelated contexts: technology, market or budgetary constraints, power relations and the status of the actors. On top of that, the system is coordinated by an ideology shared by all the actors within the system (Dunlop 1958).

Blain and Gennard (1970) have expressed the major elements of Dunlop's system approach in the following equation:

$r = f(a, t, e, s, i)$, where r =the rule of the industrial relations system; a =the actors; t =the technical context of the workplace; e =the market context or budgetary constraints; s =the power context and the status of the parties; and i =the ideology of the system.

Accordingly, the following hypotheses have been developed to assess the applicability of the system approach in the context of Walton factory.

Hypothesis 1: The more the actors interact in practice, the more peaceful the industrial relations in Walton.

Hypothesis 2: Technological context has a relationship with peaceful industrial relations in Walton.

Hypothesis 3: The market context has a connection with peaceful industrial relations in Walton.

Hypothesis 4: The power context has a positive impact on peaceful industrial relations in Walton.

Hypothesis 5: Ideological context has a positive impact on peaceful industrial relations in Walton.

Methodology

Research Design

The survey was conducted in March 2019 at Walton Manufacturing Industry, Savar, Dhaka, Bangladesh. Data were collected through simple random sampling, including 120 respondents. Several questionnaires were developed for each of the hypotheses, aligning with the five factors of industrial relations . In addition, a questionnaire was also prepared for collecting demographic information of the respondents. The data and information of this study were analyzed according to the following modalities.

Demographic Information

Demographic data were collected on the nature of jobs, official positions, religion, age, gender, marital status, education, and geographical distributions of the respondents. Respondents (employees of the Walton) represent different age groups and hierarchical positions. Most of them are Muslims, married, studied up to the secondary level, workers by position, and are employed in the production department. A sharp gender parity exists in terms of employment in the factory. The profiles of the respondents are presented in the following (Table 1).

Table: 1. Profiles of the Respondents

District of origin	Frequency	Percent	Age	Frequency	Percent
Bogura	3	2.5	Up to 20	2	1.7
Dhaka	9	7.5	21-25	40	33.3
Gazipur	20	16.7	26-30	42	35.0

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Jamalpur	5	4.2	31-35	30	25.0
Kurigram	5	4.2	36-40	3	2.5
Mymensing	9	7.5	41+	3	2.5
Natore	5	4.2	Total	120	100.0
Pabna	7	5.8	Gender		
Sirajgonj	10	8.3	Male	60	50.0
Tangail	47	39.2	Female	60	50.0
Total	120	100.0	Total	120	100.0
Department			Religion		
Cleaner	8	6.7	Muslim	108	90.0
Construction	10	8.3	Hindu	10	8.3
Production	74	61.7	Christian	2	1.7
R&D	13	10.8	Total	120	100.0
Supply chain	8	6.7	Marital status		
Workshop	7	5.8	Married	100	83.3
Total	120	100.0	Unmarried	3	2.5
Position			Single	17	14.2
Junior worker	13	10.83	Total	120	100.0
Junior-officer	1	0.83	Educational level		
Senior-officer	1	0.83	Primary	19	15.8
Senior worker	18	15.0	Secondary	71	59.2
Special worker	7	5.83	Higher Secondary	29	24.2
Worker	80	66.68	Graduation	1	.8
Total	120	100.0	Total	120	100.0

Model Specification and Variables

We have analyzed Dunlop's system theory based on the model set forward by Blain and Gennard (1970). Our model is presented as follows:

$$r = f (a, t, e, s, i)$$

Where;

r = the rule of the industrial relations as a whole;

a = the actors (government, employers, and employees);

t = the technical context of the workplace;

e = the market context or budgetary/economic constraints;

s = the power context and the status of the parties; and

i = the ideology of the system.

The variables derived from the model can be described as dependent and independent akin to an input and output model. Output or dependent variable was defined as ‘rule’ and the input or independent variables were ‘actors’; ‘technology’; ‘market’; ‘power’ and ‘ideology’ (Johnnie 1992). The measurement of each variable is described below.

Measurement and Reliability

The responses of the different sets of questionnaires were recorded in binary scale; YES or NO with the coding of ‘1’ or ‘0’ respectively suitable for non-parametric statistical data. The ‘actor context’ is measured by ‘policy for worker’; ‘policy for top management’; ‘trade union participation in decision-making issues’; ‘government rules’; ‘legal issues in court or tribunal’ and ‘ILO conventions’. ‘Technological context’ is measured by ‘machines and tools used in the industry’; ‘overtime’; ‘production quality conformability by machine’; and ‘digitalization attendance’. ‘Market context’ is measured by ‘demand for products produced by Walton’; ‘performance-based transfer within an organization’; ‘Walton work experiences have value for job market’; and ‘Walton prefers freshers for recruitment’. The ‘power context’ is calibrated by four items such as ‘job tasks are properly distributed by Walton authority’; ‘proper distribution of power’; ‘delegation of power’; and ‘hierarchical authority’. Finally, ‘ideology’ is measured through four categorical variables such as ‘employee welfare’; ‘convenient communication with the employer’; ‘coordination with employee’; and ‘satisfactory working environment’.

Reliability and Consistency Check

Alpha values higher than 0.60 in most of the cases manifest the reliability of the constructs and their questionnaire items. Some exceptions are observed for item numbers 1.6, 4.3, 5.1, 5.2 and 5.4. The value of Cronbach’s Alpha is presented in the following (Table 2).

Table: 2. Alpha Value of Different Entities of Five Contexts

1. Actors’ Context	Alpha value α
1.1 Organization has its own policy for employee/worker	.614
1.2 Organization has a policy for top management	.614
1.3 Trade Union association has participation in decision making this organization	.629
1.4 Government rules and regulations are followed properly	.602
1.5 In legal issues workers are allowed to go to the court or tribunal	.619
1.6 ILO conventions are practiced in this organization	.588
2. Technology Context	

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2.1 Machine and tools are used in this organization	.611
2.2 Machine-readable Employee attendance is used	.616
2.3 Overtime tools are used	.623
2.4 Production quality is checked by machine	.639
3. Market Context	
3.1 There is enough demand for products produced by this organization	.619
3.2 There is scope to transfer in a better position within an organization based on performance	.637
3.3 This experience is valuable for the Job market	.616
3.4 Walton prefers freshers for recruitment	.616
4. Power Context	
4.1 Hierarchy authority is maintained in an organization	.616
4.2 Job tasks are properly distribution	.611
4.3 Proper distribution of power	.578
4.4 Delegation of power is mentioned in this organization	.609
5. Ideological Context	
5.1 Management emphasizes employee welfare	.539
5.2 There is a convenient scope for communication with an employer	.563
5.3 Senior boss maintain coordination with employees	.611
5.4 Working environment within the department is satisfactory	.594

Reliability and internal consistency are checked through Cronbach's Alpha α . A high coefficient indicates high reliability. On the other hand, high reliability asserts minimum variance.

Analytical Formula of the Chi-square

The extent of discrepancy between an observed set of data and an expected set of data is measured using the chi-square to determine the significance of differences among various sample proportions. The following formula was used in the calculation.

$$\chi^2 = \sum \frac{O - E}{E}$$

$$\chi^2 = \text{The test statistic}; \quad \sum = \text{The sum of}; \quad O = \text{Observed frequencies};$$

$$E = \text{Expected frequencies}$$

Findings

Actors' Context

The smaller calculated value of chi-square as compared to the tabulated value tells the positive role of the government and management in peaceful industrial relations. It is observed that Walton manufacturing plant practices an enabling policy environment for the workers as well as for the top management. Most of the respondents responded that government rules, ILO rules and legal issues by the Walton authority positively contribute to harmonious industrial relations. However, trade union participation in decision-making with a very low score of 3 percent is an exception. The study thus reveals that workers do not actively participate as trade union members nor does Walton trade union have much participation in the decision-making of the management. Table 3 in the following represents the actors' context.

Table: 3. Actors' Context

Items	Chi-square χ^2	Df	p-value	Yes f %	No f %
Policy for workers	116.033 ^a	1	.000	119 99.2	1 8
Policy for top management	116.033 ^a	1	.000	119 99.2	1 8
Trade Union participation in decision making	108.300 ^a	1	.000	3 2.5	117 97.5
Government rules and regulations are followed properly	67.500 ^a	1	.000	105 87.5	15 12.5
Workers are allowed to go to the court or tribunal for legal issues	108.300 ^a	1	.000	117 97.5	3 2.5
ILO Conventions are practiced in this organization	56.033 ^a	1	.000	101 84.2	19 15.8

The calculated Chi-square value shows a significant level at .000. Thus, the hypothesis is supported by the technology context which has a relationship with Walton's peaceful industrial relations. The chi-square test is not done on the item of digitalized attendance since over 98 percent of the respondents confirm the use of the machine in production and overtime calculation in the Walton industry. Table 4 in the following represents the technology context.

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Table: 4. Technology Context

Items	Chi-square χ^2	df	p-value	Yes <i>f</i> %	No <i>f</i> %
Machine and tools are used in this industry	112.133 ^a	1	.000	118 98.3	2 1.7
Overtime tools are used	108.300 ^a	1	.000	117 97.5	3 2.5
Production quality is checked by machine	104.533 ^a	1	.000	4 3.3	116 96.7
Digitalized attendance	Constant	-	-	100 100.0	-

Market Context

For the hypothesis on the relationship between the market context and industrial relations in Walton, the calculated value of chi-square is significant at the .000 level. Therefore, we accept the hypothesis that the market context has a relationship with the peaceful industrial relations in the Walton manufacturing plant. The exception is 'fresher recruitment' where we observe the unanimous response of fresher recruitment in the Walton. The demand for the various products produced by Walton is high. It indicates the positive implication of the market context of the company. Table 5 in the following represents the market context.

Table: 5. Market Context

Items	Chi-square χ^2	df	p-value	Yes <i>f</i> %	No <i>f</i> %
Enough demand for products produced by Walton	112.133 ^a	1	.000	118 98.3	2 1.7
Scope for transfer within the organization based on performance	80.033 ^a	1	.000	109 90.8	11 9.2
Walton experience has a value in the job market	116.033 ^a	1	.000	119 99.2	1 .8
Walton prefers recruiting freshers mostly	Constant	-	-	100 100.0	-

Power Context

For the hypothesis on power context, the calculated value of chi-square is significant at the .000 level. Thus, our hypothesis supports the fact that the distribution of power in the Walton manufacturing plant has a highly significant relationship with peaceful industrial relations. The exception is in the 'hierarchical authority'. Analysis reveals that job duty and responsibility are properly distributed for peaceful industrial relations practice. Proper distribution of power is to some extent evenly distributed with about 74.2 percent in the yes category. This is also observed in the case of the delegation of power variable. As matter of fact, Walton's management follows

a hierarchical authority similar to that of the public sector.. Table 6 in the following represents the power context.

Table: 6. Power Context

Items	Chi-square χ^2	Df	p-value	Yes f %	No f %
Job tasks are properly distributed	108.300 ^a	1	.000	117 97.5	3 2.5
Proper distribution of power	28.033 ^a	1	.000	89 74.2	31 25.8
Delegation of power	108.300 ^a	1	.000	117 97.5	3 2.5
Hierarchical authority	Constant	-	-	100 (100.0)	-

Ideology Context

For the hypothesis on the ideology context, the calculated value of the chi-square is significant at the .000 level. The value of employee welfare practice and convenient communication with the employer is in the 67 and 70 percentile levels respectively. However, coordination with the employees with 97 percentiles and a satisfactory working environment with 92 percentile values may work as balancing factors in overall harmonious industrial relations. Table 7 in the following represents the ideology context.

Table: 7. Power Context

Items	Chi-square χ^2	df	p-value	Yes f %	No f %
Employee welfare	14.700 ^a	1	.000	81 67.5	39 32.5
Convenient communication with an employer	19.200 ^a	1	.000	84 70.0	36 30.0
Coordination with the employees	108.300 ^a	1	.000	117 97.5	3 2.5
Satisfactory working environment	85.723 ^b	1	.000	111 92.5	9 7.5

Discussion

The study aims to examine the salient features of industrial relations in the Walton factory of Bangladesh. While doing so, it explores the current practices of industrial relations in the Walton. It also attempts to evaluate the implications of Dunlop's theory for peaceful industrial relations.

This study hypothesized that interaction among the actors has an association with peaceful industrial relations. Walton maintains an effective industry-friendly policy framework that includes wage policy, and worker welfare policy, amongst others. The actor components

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are being effectively maintained in the Walton plant. Among the actors, relationship is pertinent for peaceful industrial relations. Coordination with employees and a congenial working environment are inevitable for peaceful industrial relations. They are significantly influencing industrial relationships in the Walton plant. Technology context items also have a significant impact on peaceful industrial relations.

Dunlop (1958) confirmed that in industrial relations technology is the subsystem of the social system along with market and power. Where technology is treated exogenous variable. Thus, the space of technological change affects the framework of industrial relations. In the present structure of industrial relations, technological transformation made the market change as well. In this study, technological impact or change had a positive impact on managing people's activities. Market orientation in Bangladesh, due to globalization and the growth of market, has forced deregulation policies by the government, reduction of tariff barriers, capital flow with investment, and privatization of state-owned enterprises. The study reveals that market context has a positive impact on peaceful industrial relations. Power context in Walton has a significant positive impact on developing industrial relationships. Job role, duty, authority, and tasks are significant matters in industrial relations. The concept of power and authority is understood in industrial relations as an innermost position to its collective part. Employer and employee involvement in power is important for peaceful industrial relations as well. Thus, the study underlines that job authority, distribution of power, delegation of power and hierarchical authority make significant impacts on peaceful industrial relations in the Walton industry. Ideology context influences positively and significantly Walton's industrial aspects. Items deriving from ideology context have a positive and significant impact on peaceful industrial relationships.

Finally, it must be kept in mind the original measurement items/statements of Dunlop theory developed in the middle of the last century has not been reproduced in the context of Bangladesh. Responses received in Bangladesh might have some lacking in logical reasoning which render modest alpha values. Despite this modest alpha value, this analysis is principally meaningful primarily because no work so far is done in the manufacturing sector of Bangladesh (Islam and Siengthai 2009).

CONCLUSION

This study is a novel attempt to express the implications of Dunlop's sociological system approach in a leading manufacturing industry in Bangladesh. The system approach proposed by Dunlop provides a meaningful understanding of the context of peaceful industrial relations. The study employed a quantitative approach to test the formulated hypotheses. The interrelated components of this approach was measured statistically and revealed a consistent relationship each with other. It has been noted that the key components of the system approach such as 'actor', 'technology', 'market', 'power' and 'ideology' are being significantly and positively practiced in the Walton plant. Where the ideology gives the bindings to shape the behavior of the actors, the market brings the cash flow for investment, the power context reshapes the workers' voice, ensures their rights, and minimizes conflict, and the technological transformation helps to change the market behavior.

While industrial relations play a crucial role in economic stability and labor rights, a growing industrialized country like Bangladesh must maintain a sustained, balanced, and effective industrial relations system. It can facilitate production and productivity, help achieve sound and harmonious labor-management relationship through avoiding unhealthy atmosphere in the industry. Without proper industrial relations, economic progress may be at risk due to growing concerns of strikes, protests, and contradictions.

Overall, this study produces some important insights for academics in the field of industrial sociology and practitioners in industrial relations. Considering the importance of industrial relations, scholars and practitioners in Bangladesh should apply this theory to broader datasets to grasp a deeper understanding about its complex dynamics. Thus, in turn, can inform appropriate policy measures to establish and sustain industrial democracy.

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Makale Bilgisi/Article Information

<i>Etik Beyan:</i>	Bu çalışmanın hazırlanma sürecinde bilimsel ve etik ilkelere uyulduğu ve yararlanılan tüm çalışmaların kaynakçada belirtildiği beyan edilir.	<i>Ethical Statement:</i>	It is declared that scientific and ethical principles have been followed while carrying out and writing this study and that all the sources used have been properly cited.
<i>Çıkar Çatışması:</i>	Çalışmada kişiler veya kurumlar arası çıkar çatışması bulunmamaktadır.	<i>Conflict of Interest:</i>	The authors declare that declare no conflict of interest.
<i>Yazar Katkı Beyanı:</i>	Birinci yazarın makaleye katkısı %50, ikinci yazarın makaleye katkısı %50'dir.	<i>Author Contribution Declaration:</i>	The contribution of the first author to the article is 50% and the contribution of the second author to the article is 50%.
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