

PUBLIC SERVICE IN NIGERIA AND OPERATIONAL ISSUES: PROBLEMS AND THE WAYS FORWARD

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ABSTRACT

The issue of enhancing Nigeria's public service performance has been a major concern to policy makers and researchers. This is because despite all measures and reforms put in place to arrest the trend, it seems, it has defied all approaches towards tackling the problem of inefficiency, and service delivery has remained poor. This paper discusses the challenges facing Nigeria's public service towards effective service delivery and the way forward. The paper adopted content analysis as a method of data collection and analysis. It finds among others, that corruption, ethnicism and poor remuneration are factors that inhibit effective performance in the Nigeria public service and suggests options for effective and efficient service-oriented public service. The challenges were viewed in two perspectives, external and internal with individual peculiarities. It is the believe, that we create an institution which promote an ideal working environment that captures a more collective interest and speak of collective vision with the picture in mind of today's issues with focus on torn arrows challenge. A glance at Nigerian

workers shows motivational problems which is traceable to the variety of circumstances as noticed in the various environments. These challenges can be addressed by both management and government to introduce useful, lasting measure and practices to stir the sea of management to meet its "big picture"

Keywords: *Public Service, Managing, Challenges, Environment, Nigeria.*

Introduction

The peculiarity of Nigeria work environment demands a peculiar consideration with a view to proffering peculiar assertion. As Nigeria is blessed with both human and natural resources, a holistic capturing and consideration of our working environment becomes eminent, bearing in mind the challenges facing managers that manage within such environment. A predominant factor becomes how to function well as a manager within such environment, especially when most times the controlling variables to tackle such challenge are seen outside the reach of the manager. At such moment, managing becomes a daunting challenge.

In trying not to b'e brave, the choice of this topic "Public service in Nigeria and operational issues problems and ways forward" can never be more eminent than now in the calendar of today's Nigeria. The choice of writing this paper is to capture both audiences within and outside the public service cycle; as such, the most common expression of English usage is most important. Furthermore, our concern is not to reopen the exodus of public service and

its established concept that is expressed as the work of management in modern terms is generic and continuous.

The performance of the public service towards national development is no doubt the most tasking challenge that the government of Nigeria is facing today (Osawe, 2015). The Public Service reflects the state of the nation and no nation has been able to advance beyond its public service. Studies have shown that no nation can attain sustainable development for the enhancement of the living standard of the people without a properly organized public service to implement government policies.

The public sector service in Nigeria operates in a highly fractionalized society with ethnicity as a prominent form of identity (Eifert, Miguel & Posner, 2010). This scenario often creates lopsided outcomes where lack of trust becomes a major problem in inter-personal and group relationships. In such situations, negative politicking which often is marred by betrayals becomes the order of the day. Employees operate in parochial cliques, guided by clichés and stereotypes that propel them to strike at the slightest opportunity in advancement of sub-optimal interests. Mediocrity is thus amplified through eye-service and bootlicking in such manners that organizational objectives are significantly compromised and productivity often hindered. This form of identity-based politics leads to biases and prejudices that obviously undermine public sector performance.

According to Abati (2016), the quality of human resources in any organization determines the quality of inputs and outputs. A country thrives only when the public sector is

effective, and the public sector can only be effective when well considered policy provisions are enforced. The selection and promotion of employees, who work in public service organizations in Nigeria, should be based on competence and quest to deliver the required services. Unfortunately, the selection and recruitment processes into the Nigerian public service have often been compromised and skewed towards preferred persons along blood and friendship ties. It is against the foregoing that this paper seeks to analyze the public service and operational issues in Nigeria and the way forward.

Public Service

Public service is collectivity of specialized government institutions or agencies established by law, financed by public money and staffed by professionals and career bureaucrats for the purpose of executing public policies. It is not profit-oriented but an institution established to deliver essential services to the people (Arowolo, 2012). Public sector consists of governments and all publicly controlled or publicly funded agencies, enterprises, and other entities that deliver public programmes, goods or services.

Public service is a body or department in the executive arm of government with the responsibility of assisting in the planning and implementation of government policies. The concept of public good also indicates that there are some services that are utilized by all members, which are efficient and effective when provided for centrally. Public service consists of civil service career staff, national assembly staff, public officers in the military, police and

paramilitary services, employees of parastatals, educational and health institutions whose recruitment, promotion and assessment are under the exclusive control of the Civil Service Commission (CSC), at federal, state and local government levels.

The Role of Management in the public service

It is interesting to stress the predominant roles management play in our everyday life not minding the classification of our given institution. The coverage of such scope transcends institutional boundaries and sectional disciplines. The possibilities of any functional institutions, is dependent on the function of management even where such terms are not captured or expressed literally. The connectivity with the cycle of action and reactions within any system demand and requires the services of management. The multiplier effect for the need of management practice is made accessible in its sectionalisation with each providing specific skill to furnish practitioners with relevant information to make better decision that will be visible in their everyday activities. These categories more often than not range from: Human resource management, Organizational behaviour and management, Change management, Marketing management, Management information system, Production/operational management, etc.

Deliberate attempt have been made to isolate the very essence of management practice within some giving disciplines and institutions as noticed in the definition of concept. The lack of which has literally reduce the impact of the given construct as against expected result and

practicability envisage. A result which buttresses that institution cannot function in isolation without management practice as that is the very essence of the institution. Management is viewed as the engine room that defines the flow of all economic and productive activities within the public services and public sectors.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Weber's theory of bureaucracy which was propounded by Max Weber on the assumptions that man is naturally lazy to work, yet he is materialistic in his approach. The argument is that the effectiveness of an organization should be based on a system of legal rules that are impersonal. It implies that these rules are legally derived from the law of the land, and employees should obey the law and not individuals in the office. That is, obeying the law regulating the office and not the office holder.

This system of legal rules sets the standard operational procedure and norms used to regulate the behaviour of employees in an organization. In Nigeria public service, most employees tend to pay their loyalty to their boss and not the job. Max Weber further argued that (recruitment, promotion, transfer and even retirement) in an organization should be based on merit, qualification, competence and performance. The Weber's theory is relevant to this study on the ground that bureaucracy is the principle that guides the setting and operation of Nigeria public sector service which has been affected by primeval factors such as (nepotism, corruption, federal character principle etc).

Methodology

This study adopted qualitative research design. The study employed content analysis to examine the challenges that affect the performance of Nigerian public service. The study which is theoretical in nature is based on secondary data which include journal publications, textbooks and Internet sources. Multiple secondary sources were used to minimize risk of error.

Challenges of the Nigerian Public Service

Despite attempts by successive governments in Nigeria to ensure ethical standard, value and improve attitudes for better performance of the public service, several challenges still militate against the performance of public service in Nigeria. Some of these challenges include the following:

Inappropriate Organizational Structure: The public service has been peddled as being inappropriately organized, and improperly managed. For instance, records, documents, files and other sources of information are not well arranged nor properly coordinated. This may be due to frequent movement of workers or non-delineation of responsibilities. It also leads to duplication of offices and positions. The public service is often criticized for wasting financial and manpower resources, and retaining unproductive workers with the creation of ministries, departments and positions with similar functions.

Culture: Another factor that affects the performance of public servants in Nigeria is the culture of the people. Culture defines the total way of life of a people. In Nigeria

the culture for respect for an elder, un-common loyalty, brotherly love etc affect service delivery in the public service. There are situations where an employee cannot effectively be corrected or disciplined because of his age, religion or ethnic affiliation. Another area where loyalty and respect has been observed playing its negative role in the public service is the issue of paying loyalty to individuals in an office rather than the public service itself. Most public servants are seen wasting greater part of their productive (official) time rendering services to their boss and their boss relatives at the expense of their work. It is not uncommon to see many Nigerian employees attending social functions, domestic activities even during their official hours just to please their boss, and to earn unmerited favour.

Ethnicism: Ethnicism refers to the nature, content and focus of inter-ethnic relationship and interaction among the different ethnic groups in a multi-ethnic society. However, this affects the development and growth of public service in Nigeria. Nigerians and the public officers see themselves first, as a member of a clan, and more interestingly as a member of an ethnic nationality. People hide under this guise of defending one's ethnic group, while pursuing personal and selfish interest in the public service. Ethnicism in the actual sense has multiple negative effects, especially on the issue of chances in the public service being determined by one's ethnic nationality rather than on merit.

Political-Factor: This is another issue that has hindered effective performance in the public service. The Nigerian public service over the years has been politicized to the

extent that most top officials openly support the government. For instance, policies are usually made for the selfish and egoistic interests of the political leaders and sometimes only to attract public attention with less regard to effective practical implementation (Ikechuckwu & Chukwuemeke, 2013). According to Salisu, (2001) considerable political interference in the process of personnel administration has led to improper delegation of power, ineffective supervision and corruption in the Nigerian public service in recent time. This results in official apathy that has so far culminated into unreasonable absenteeism, lateness and idleness and particularly poor workmanship in the Nigerian public service. Continuous change of government brings along a change of political appointees like ministers, commissioners and career top civil servants such as the head of service and directors, with their own policies and programmes disrupting those formerly implemented.

Corruption: Corruption has been recognized as a major problem in the Nigerian Public Service system. Corruption exists in various forms such as inflation of contracts, bribery, nepotism, embezzlement, misappropriation, favouritism, diversion of public resources for personal gain, violation of procedures to advance personal interest, etc. Corruption has led to wastage of government property and militates against the growth of public institutions and agencies. The smooth operation of the public sector service is often handicapped by bribery and corruption. Many civil servants demand monetary and other gratifications before carrying out their duties to the citizens. Service Failure is the consequence of the twin

evils of corruption and indiscipline and the resultant effect of these evils is organizational inefficiency.

Inadequate Training: The performance of public service system in Nigeria is affected by inadequate training. Many Nigerian public servants lack the necessary managerial and technical competence to discharge their responsibilities. This has contributed to their poor performance as agents of socio-economic transformation. The Nigerian public service system lacks adequate training policy. Training is usually seen as a period of relaxation and hence public servants do not pay attention to it. The implication is that the bureaucrats assumed increased responsibilities in socio-economic policies and management without imparting necessary training to acquire techno-managerial skills which is fundamental to increased productivity (Iheanacho, 2012).

Poor Remuneration: The wages and salaries of public servants in Nigeria is obviously low and has in fact continued to decline over the years due to high rate of inflation and other causes. Despite the increment in salary, the public service salary in Nigeria is still very low when compared with the private sector and the public services of other countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Nigeria's public service remuneration continues to trail behind others (Achimugun, Stephen & Aliyu, 2013). This situation leaves the average Nigerian public servant demoralized, angry and ready to indulge in corrupt practices at the slightest opportunity because of the low salary, as most of them have side businesses which they dedicate their time and talent to. Consequently, this affects the performance of the public service.

Negation of Merit Principle: The merit principle ensures efficient public service by appointing competent and capable public servants through competitive examinations to manage government affairs. The implication is that all recruitments, appointments and promotions are made on the basis of merit. It is worrisome that the Federal Character Principle has undermined the objective of merit principle. The Federal Character Principle enshrined in 1999 constitution clearly stated that all appointments into federal public sector and all allocation of values, should reflect proportionately the diverse composition of the federation. The Federal Character Principle encourages sectionalism and ethnicism. It also militates against the appointment of the most qualified and competent persons into the public service system. With appointments based on Federal Character Principle instead of merit system, the Nigerian public service cannot function effectively as an instrument of economic growth and social progress (Iheanacho, 2012).

Nigeria's public service, in general, is a mess; this is mainly because written provisions about how the public sector should be managed and made truly accountable to the general public are actually not enforced. There seem to be no consequences for the ubiquitous disregard of laid-down rules and directives. Over time, indiscipline and impunity have become so normalized that the rules are now rarely given any regard except to blackmail and harass officials who choose to stand up to the vicious power-brokers.

The ways forward:

The following factors are likely to provide potential institutional drivers for efficiency in Nigeria's public service:

Effective Staff Recruitment: Recruitment is an integral part of human resources, and involves the process of identifying and attracting or encouraging potential applicants with needed skills to fill vacant positions in an organization (Peretomode & Peretomode, 2011). Thus, to enhance proper performance in the public sector, recruitment should be based on impartial selection, administrative competence, political impartiality, willingness to exhibit spirit of service towards the community, qualification of potential applicants and technical experience.'

Adoption of Empirical Performance Measurement and Appraisal: There is need to adopt empirical performance appraisal, which must be systematic, holistic, verifiable and universally acceptable. Performance appraisal must be devoid of victimization, favouritism, tribalism and God-fatherism so that it will not be counterproductive. Public servants are highly demoralized when the appraisal does not reflect the true evaluation of their performance. Dessler (2011) states that measuring employees' performance should be based on critical incident file, rating scale, narrative, ranking, Behavioural Anchored Rating Scale (BARS) and Management By Objectives (MBO). According to Casio (2010), for appraisal to be effective there is need for a high degree of agreement

between the employee and their manager on what they are trying to do.

E-Governance: To enhance high productivity in the public sector in this age of globalization, it is vital that public service institutions embrace E-governance. The essence of technology and the increasing utilization of the internet are to open the frontiers of opportunities. When E-governance is adopted, the bureaucratic bottleneck resulting from delay in communication and quality of services provided to the public will be prevented. E-government results to lower costs as well as improved efficiency and quality of services and enables public workers to be more transparent and accountable.

- Set key performance indicators (KPIs) across Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) in line with broad national economic objectives across sectors;
- Set KPIs against key officeholders and heads of MDAs;
- Ensure that the heads of MDAs are provided with the tools, funds and capable staff they need to function effectively;
- Review quarterly performances of MDAs and reward and or punish agencies and officers as dictated by agreed performance measurement templates;
- Enforce existing written policy standards of accountability;
- Set annual sector growth rates and make public sector officers to understand their roles in

achieving the expected growth target and monitor performance and recommend further action:

- Reduce human intervention in public sector processes and procedures by applying Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML).
- Promote public/ private sector collaboration through internship arrangement that allows each side to see the other's strengths and weaknesses. The partnership may assist in breaking down mutual suspicion and promote a better understanding of each other's position.

New Public Management (NPM): New Public Management is a concept used to describe a management culture that emphasizes the centrality of the citizen or customer, as well as accountability for results. It is a set of broadly similar administrative doctrines, which dominated the public administration reform agenda of most Organizations for Economic Cooperation and development (OECD) countries from the late 1970s. Greater efficiency can be achieved in public sector if public managers are given managerial autonomy to allocate resources but only if they are held accountable for results.

The main elements of NPM include:

- Hands-on professional management in the public sector: This means allowing the managers to manage. The typical justification for this is that accountability requires clear assignment of responsibility for action.

- Explicit standards and measures of performance: This requires goals to be defined and performance targets to be set. This sets out the basis for judging performance.
- Greater emphasis on output controls: It reflects the need to stress on results rather than administrative procedures.
- Disaggregation of units in the public sector. This involves the breaking up of large entities into corporatized units that are task focused.
- Competition in the public sector: This involves the contracts and public tendering procedures, that is, move to term.
- Economical use of public sector resources (reducing direct costs, raising labour discipline and limiting compliance costs to business).
- Private-sector style of management: Move away from traditional public service to more flexible pay, hiring, rules, etc)

Conclusion

This study examined the Nigerian Public Service System, its Challenges and the way forward. The study identified those problems that undermine the performance of the system. These problems include corruption, negation of merit principle, inadequate training, poor remuneration, culture, ineffective organizational culture and ethnicism. In order to enhance the performance of Nigerian public service system, it is hoped that sincere implementation of the suggested measures would go a long way to make Nigerian public service function effectively as a veritable

instrument of socio-economic progress and nation building. Also, in this age of globalization, it is essential to say that for the Nigerian public service to be able to cope with international demand, there is need to observe the principles of New Public Management and ideal public service sector.

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