



Administrative Weakness, Politics of Recruitment and Impediments to Effective Service Delivery in the Nigerian Public Sector: The Dilemma of Human Resource Managers

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Abstract

Effective public service delivery constitutes one of the most crucial roles of a responsible government in any given political entity. As such, its contribution to societal development and stability cannot be overemphasized. The quality of public service delivery obtainable in any country of the world is determined majorly by the productive capacity of her workforce which is linked to the outcome of the recruitment processes. The objective of this paper, therefore, is to determine the impact of administrative weakness and politics of recruitment on effective service delivery in the Nigerian public sector, as well as the implication of not adopting a pragmatic approach towards addressing the situation. Secondary sources of data were explored for this study. Findings reveal that the existence of weak administrative structures, non-adherence to the globally acceptable best practices in recruitments, appointments and promotions, as well as undue pressure emanating from the table of political elites are the major challenges facing the human resource managers in the discharge of their duties. It recommends that recruitments, appointments and promotion should be based on the merit criteria, rather than sentimental attachments, in order to enhance effective service delivery in the Nigerian public sector. Again, the introduction and enhancement of formidable administrative principles will constitute a panacea to the above mentioned challenges.

Keywords: Administrative Weakness, Politics of Recruitment, Effective Service Delivery, Public Sector, Human Resource Management

Introduction

Recruitment and selection have been identified as the major roles of human resource managers within the organizational spectrum. These crucial administrative functions are getting increasingly more complex, considering the ever-dynamic nature of work environment and the wider society at large. Experiences in Nigeria and those of other developing countries, particularly in the sub-Saharan Africa shows a conflict of interests as human resource managers are constantly trapped in the dilemma of either recruiting highly-skilled manpower or serving the interests of higher authorities and political gladiators. Ekanem (2016) opines that contending with administrative problems has to do with the aggregate challenges which administrators have to face, and the problems which they have to solve in the process of implementing public policies. The rationale is that meaningful experiences provide the employee with self-verifying information and make the job and organization attractive to the individual. The level of diversity inherent in work environments can best be understood and appreciated from the perspective of person-organization-interface, as each individual brings to fore, diverse interests, views, orientation, perceptions and backgrounds which invariably impacts on and shape shapes organizational cultures and values. Chan, (2005) opined that the future of any organization lies in the ability to manage the diverse body of talents that can bring innovative ideas, perspectives and views to their work.

However, a number of factors are largely responsible for the worrisome level of inefficiency in the Nigerian public service. These include, but not restricted to: poor working environments, low motivation, inadequate remuneration, lack of adequate training for employees and other irregularities associated with recruitment processes. The endemic corruption, inequality in level of income; rising poverty and periodic outbreak of diseases, all contribute to the challenge of governance. The quest of political power and politics of resource control, add to the already burning rage in the Nigerian polity. The growing poverty and its effect on majority of the population have further led to the impoverishment of the masses. These and more seem to constitute serious impediments to the realization of effective service delivery in the Nigerian public sector. Given the seemingly hopeless situation in Nigeria and beyond, effective service delivery becomes more or less a mirage.

Conceptual Review

Administrative Weakness

Generally speaking, the existence of weak administrative institutions in any given political entity constitutes the greatest setback to the realization of any meaningful sustainable development. This is more so, in the light of the fact that it undermines the translation of government policies into actions, with corresponding adverse ripple effects on the wider society. Although numerous countries in the Sub-Saharan African region seem to be trapped in this anomaly, Nigeria appears to be the worst hit, with an over-bloated unproductive work force; it still cannot serve the citizens effectively. According to World Bank study of Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), the problem of Africa's development is a crisis of governance. The study further affirms that because of the countervailing power that has been lacking, state officials in many countries, including Nigeria, have served their own interests without the fear of being called to account (Lawal and Owolabi, 2012). According to Inakefe (2021), the immediate challenge before the administrators requires the combination of administrative skills, material and immaterial resources, as well as tangible and intangible resources to meet the ends of public policies, aimed to ameliorate an undesirable condition. Ekanem (2021) added that administrative problems are primarily human in nature. Hence, administrators have to be equipped with a wide range of philosophical, theoretical, psychological and a large mass of organizational theories about human nature, the nature of the organization, system and cultural setting of the organization to handle them. Weak administrative institutions become the altar on which effective service delivery is sacrificed, particularly in the Nigerian public sector organizations. Anam (2012) maintained that a system of compensation and rewards should be developed by the administrator to maintain a balance between job and skills, performance and seniority, fixed pay and group incentives, intrinsic and extrinsic rewards, as well as the participation and non-participation of employees. It follows that the existence of formidable and reliable administrative institution is a prerequisite for the sustainable development of any given country.

Politics of Recruitment

The process of recruitment and selection in the Nigerian public sector is characterized by clash of interests, sentimental politics, pre-modial bias and unproductive policies such as federal character system and the quota system, and this has immensely contributed to the poor human capital usually found in the public sector. With a population of over Two Hundred Million and rising, Nigeria is Africa's most populated country; and one of the most populated countries of the world, thus, making its governance difficult. The country is being splintered with over Two Hundred and Fifty ethnic groups, over Five Hundred and Twenty languages – all of which accumulate to further compound the already existing clash of interests.

Misfits between the individual and the job translate into serious implications for public sector organizations. Experiences show that inappropriate person-job-fit results to job dissatisfaction and greater turnover intentions. According to Cable and Parsons (2001), job dissatisfaction can result to lower levels of customer satisfaction and organizational performance, as well as higher levels of absenteeism and turnover.

The challenges facing the Nigerian public service in her quest to ensure effective service delivery to citizens, is ever worsened by the introduction of 'Federal Character Principle' and 'Quota System'. This contravenes the merit criteria, enhances mediocrity and the emergence of intellectually porous and morally bankrupt citizens into exalted positions in the Nigerian public service.

Effective Service Delivery

Public service refers to services which are provided by government to citizens; either directly through public sector organizations or indirectly by financing the provision of such services. Such services include, but not limited to health care services, educational services, and social welfare services for the poor and the marginalized, among others.

One of the fundamental reasons for the establishment of government in any given political system is to deliver effective social services to her citizens at very subsidized rates. Essentially, government is charged with the responsibility of providing effective services to members of the public. Effective public service delivery provides important analysis for policy makers, businesses, academics and civil society organizations. It also provides a clue as to how such services can be improved if government encourages the participation of citizens and feedback in public service delivery.

Landell-Mills and Serageldin (1992) are of the view that:

"Good governance depends on the extent to which government is perceived and accepted as legitimate; committed to improving the public welfare and responsive to the needs of its citizens; competent to assure law and order and deliver public services, and able to create an enabling policy environment for productive activities; and equitable in its conduct".

The central objective of public sector organizations is to ensure the delivery of essential social services to citizens, rather than profit maximization.

Human Resource Management

There is a wide-range of resources at the disposition of any organization. These include time, machines and equipment, structures and finances, but human elements have been identified as the greatest resource available to any given organization. This is more so, owing to the fact that it has the ability to mobilize and put other resources to productive use. Nwosu, (2017), observed that human resources ordinarily supersede other resources in organizations.

It is usually referred to as the most important resources in organizations as it is solely capable of directing and utilizing other resources for productive purposes.

According to Buettner (2015), human resources was a consequence of human relations movement of the early 20th century, when scholars started recording processes of creating organizational values through the strategic management of manpower. Initially, the role was dominated by transactional work as payroll and benefits administration, but with the emergence of globalization, technological advancement, organizational consolidation and further research, human resource approach to management emphasizes strategic planning, talent management, succession planning, and the management of workplace diversities. Hence, the greatest task before the human resource managers and administrators is how to get qualified hands to assume responsibilities in the workplace.

Orga and Ogbo (2012) also identified human resource as the most important resource of any organization, adding that any effort spared in motivating the workforce will pay off. Boujelbene and Affes (2013) maintained that employee values are portrayed in the knowledge competencies, skills, experiences, abilities, and talent of company employees and managers as veritable resources. Human Resource Management also refers to a set of consciously coordinated procedures aimed at adequately and effectively managing people towards enhanced productivity at the workplace. Chukwumeka (2004) identified the functions of Human Resources Management as:

- Wages and salaries administration
- Appraisal of workforce
- Employee/labour relations
- Employee welfare
- Job analysis and evaluation
- Personnel policies and institution
- Performance standard evaluation, and
- Separation

Organizations and management cannot function without people. Hence the proper engagement and use of people as organizational resources has a direct and significant bearing on the performance of the Nigerian Public sector organizations.

Person-Job-Fit and Impediments to Effective Service Delivery in the Nigerian Public Sector

A number of factors are largely responsible for the non-performance of most public sector organizations in the Nigerian society; among them is Person-job-fit. Person-job-fit entails a two-way approach of fitting the job to the man, on the one hand, and fitting the man to the job, on the other. Lawal and Tobi (2006) maintained that:

'In order to restore sanity to the Nigerian public service, all the unprofessional tendencies such as ethnicity and nepotism in appointments and promotions, lack of security of tenure and the appointment of non-career public servants into key positions in the public service should be stopped'.

This, according to them, would discourage public servants who are tempted to abuse their public offices due to frustrations, not to do so. Nkata (2015) identified the seven challenges of leadership in Africa as:

- The policy of rewarding friends and punishing enemies
- Nepotism
- Blurred vision of leaders
- Competition for pre-eminence
- Corruption
- Dictatorship, and
- Failure to re-define goals

In Nigeria, the level of accountability among public officials in the management of public affairs has constantly declined since independence, and the rate of annual economic growth of the country has generally declined over the period.

Generally speaking, the major impediments to effective service delivery in the Nigerian public sector include, but not limited to the following:

- Lack of adequate motivation
- Poor attitude to work

- Unfavourable working environment
- Inadequate remuneration
- Indiscipline in public service, and
- Lack of proper accountability

Politics of Recruitment: Implication for Effective Public Service Delivery in Nigeria

Politics, by its very nature, entails the struggle for personal interest, as opposed to collective wellbeing. As such, experience has shown that anyone vested with power will abuse it. Osakwe (2007) explained politics of recruitment to mean the recruitment and selection that are based on political patronage or determined by the political class. According to Omeje and Ndukwe, (2009), politicization of recruitment is the unconventional practice of employing political interests by those in the public offices to fill existing and non-existing vacancies in the public service, without following the due process.

The Nigerian public service is constrained by over-politicization and corruption which makes it highly challenging to achieve the purpose for which it was created. Recruitment and placement have been identified as the basic functions of human resource managers in organized work environments. If abused, the outcome of such activities will be undesirable. Olasehinde (2015) observed that the effect of the exercise has been identified as the bane of the service which includes corruption, inefficiency, low productivity and indiscipline, among others.

In the Nigerian context, the process of recruitment and replacement are carried out to serve the interests of the ruling class, with the introduction of informal quota arrangement, as against the universally acceptable practice of advertisement and competitive examinations. Egeonu (2018) posits that corruption among the leaders of Africa has reached superlative proportion, adding that no society survives unmitigated corruption. Human resource managers and administrators are trapped in the dilemma of dual loyalty: either to the state, or to the political masters, both of which are associated with obvious implications. Such irregularities associated with recruitment processes in the Nigerian public service create conducive atmosphere for insubordination to thrive, as one cannot possibly superintend over a subordinate possessing superior knowledge and yet, expect loyalty.

In the opinion of Nwosu, (2017), employers in the Nigerian Public Service mostly focus on qualifications and experience of candidates being considered for vacant positions. Credentials do not necessarily make employees. Academic training by itself might not even adequately prepare a person for a job. The same is applicable to experience which might neither be 'cognate' nor 'relevant'

Okoli (2010) posits that bureaucracy in the developing countries of the world, especially Africa, is saddled with a number of problems which vitiate their role as the ultimate instrument of control for efficient and effective administration of the national development. Similarly, Nebo et al, (2015) observed that:

'It is no longer right quality Human Capital Recruitment; it is 'Cognitive Melodrama' of 'Man-know-man syndrome' as an edge to get a job in the Nigerian public sector, whether experienced or inexperienced'.

Beyond the notion of 'connection-based recruitment', as typified in Karl Marx's assertion on 'empire building', in most cases, job vacancies are the exclusive reserves of the highest bidders.

The consequences of politics of recruitment and selection are manifest in various ways. These include:

- Pervasive corruption
- Gross inefficiency
- Low productivity
- Emergence of redundant workforce
- Indiscipline, and
- Mediocrity

Political Interference and the Dilemma of Human Resource Managers in Nigeria

In the Nigerian context, the administrative apparatus has greatly been weakened by undue political pressures, thereby, making it difficult, if not impossible, to perform its constitutional roles. Madubuko (2009) observed that:

'The major challenge to the human resource manager of a government controlled organization: local, state or federal is the issue of god-fatherism and ever changing policies'.

In the opinion of Orga and Ogbu (2012), the human resource manager is in a dilemma. This situation can best be termed 'dilemma of dual loyalty'. Orga and Ogbu (2012), further pointed out that parties in Nigeria have no ideological leanings. Government and policies are not therefore based on the party in power. They are rather based on individual occupants of power with the result that there is no continuity of policies.

Theoretical Framework

This study anchors on 'Resource-Based Theory' as a framework for analysis. This theory was originally propounded by Birger Wernerfelt (1984) and later developed and refined by Jay .B. Barney (1991) and other scholars. It is a well-establish strategy to management with its origin linked to Edith Penrose's writings in 1959, which gave peculiar insights into the process of resource acquisition, utilization and expansion for gaining competitive advantage (Rugman and Verbeke, 2002). According to 'Resource-Based Theory', resources that are valuable, rare, difficult to imitate and non-substitutable best position an organization for long term success. These strategic resources can provide the foundation to develop and expand the capacity of organization which invariably translates to superior performance overtime. It portrays the ability of an organization to leverage on resources and capabilities to create desirable goods and services.

The underlying assumptions of the 'Resource-Based Theory' are:

- Organizations that own strategic resources possess important competitive advantages over organizations that do not.
- Some resources such as cash and trucks are not considered to be strategic because competitors can readily acquire them.
- A resource is strategic to the extent that it is valuable, rare, difficult to imitate and non-substitutable.
- Valuable resources aid in improving the organization's effectiveness and efficiency while neutralizing the opportunities and threats of competitors.
- If valuable resources are possessed by a few firms, those firms that are able to control these resources potentially tend to generate sustained competitive advantage (Barney, 1991).

Application of 'Resource-Based Theory' to Nigerian Public Sector Organizations

The need for proper utilization of the strategic resources embedded in the public sector organization workforce is very crucial to enhance service delivery to citizens. The ability to identify and harness such comparative advantage largely depends on the extent to which employers of labour in this sphere is ready to subject all applicants to highly competitive and rigorous recruitment processes, aimed at engaging the most qualified and committed personnel for the challenging roles of patriotic national service to the state.

Such processes should not only be transparent, but also be seen to be transparent and devoid of the dominance of any personal interests over collective good. Beyond the ability to enhance service delivery in public sector organizations, the enthronement of meritocracy will undoubtedly spur the spirit of healthy competition among the younger generation, the result of which will be a more stable and egalitarian society.

Conclusion

The Nigerian public service depicts managerial inefficiency. Ethnicity, tribalism, nepotism and wide spread corruption, among others, are largely responsible for the deplorable condition of the service. Notwithstanding the rising inflation and the unprecedented hike in cost of goods at the commodity markets, the poor salary structure, inadequate capacity-building training, low motivation and lack of adequate scale of incentives, have largely contributed to the ill-happenings in the service, as people continually seek alternative means to make ends meet. One can rightly conclude that the prevailing level of extortion and abuse of power is not by any means unconnected with the plight of the Nigerian public servants. The implication of this decay is brain-drain as we continually loose experts in various fields to more developed economies. The emergence of visionary, goal-driven and transformational leaders is capable of changing the narrative.

Recommendations

Following a critical review of available literatures, the study makes the following recommendations:

- Government at all levels should strive to mastermind the existence of formidable administrative institutions to bring about the much desired improvement in the Nigerian public service.
- There is need for value reorientation on the part of public servants, aimed at enhanced efficient and effective service delivery.
- Recruitments, appointments and promotions in the public service should strictly reflect the merit criteria, rather than on some other pre-modal sentiments.
- Political interference and dominance in administrative activities should be discouraged in all its forms and ramifications.
- Human resource managers and administrators should be equipped with adequate knowledge, skills and capacity to manage workplace diversities and pressures arising from conflicts of interests.
- Public Service Commission should rise up to its constitutional roles and function independently without allowing for political interference on administrative matters.

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