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Public Service and Rules: Implications for Institutional Administration in Nigeria

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Abstract

The paper examines some hindrances to achieving effective and efficient Public Service delivery in Nigeria. It also highlights basic Public Service rules and Conduct and recommends regular re-training of staff and will- power by those in authority to apply official sanctions dispassionately as measures that could ensure effective service delivery in Nigeria Public Service in the years ahead.

Keywords: Public Service, Administration, Employee, Manager, Nigeria

Introduction

Most Nigerians in their self employment are very hardworking but when they are in the Public Service, their attitude to work generally falls below expectation (Ahiauzu, 1999). Many authors have confirmed this statement and use the following indices as evidence. Staffs are late to work, not creative, show very little integrity, spend work time on truancy or activities not related to their employment, and slow in the acceptance of change.

These abnormal attitudes could be as a result of the following factors:

Cultural Background: Some of us came from background where the culture is not in conformity with the Public Service ethics e.g. the culture of determining time based on the position of the sun; or background where the quantum of titles one has confers on one a degree of immunity e.g. Comrade, Honorable, Sir/Lady, Chief, Reverend, Elder etc. These titles displayed in the Public Service build false consciousness on the holder, and may weaken discipline. The Public Service is however interested in productivity not titles. Others include respect for age, and sex.

Belief system: Our belief system is another negative influence on productivity. Nigerians are very religious people. Christianity is very popular in this part of the country, but most of those who steal Government time for example are those who are very religious. This happens in spite of the fact that all religions teach Integrity. The effect of transfer of religious belief to the workplace makes a typical

Nigerian believe that his promotion or misfortune in the workplace is traceable to God not his conduct (Ahiauzu, 1999). It is even worse for Muslims as they believe in destiny; so, whatever happens in their career is the will of Allah.

The effect is that the 'native' Public Servant has a lackadaisical attitude to work or works when he anticipates sanction for poor service delivery.

Web of kinship: Most Public Servants do not easily adapt to relationships in the workplace but tie themselves to the apron strings of ethnicity, fraternal groups (Religion) or informal groups. These webs in turn constitute themselves into defense mechanisms or informants for their member in authority instead of contributing to the success of the organization. The member in authority in return may favor them with promotion and may even promote some beyond their carrying capacity. Such people become nuisance in high positions. Sometimes because of this web of kinship, a University that is expected to be a universal community could turn out to be an ethnic community and sanction becomes difficult.

Methodology of Research

In this paper, we adopted both descriptive and exploratory analysis to discuss meaning, nature, features and implications of public service and rules in the Nigerian context as applicable in high institutional administration. It employed fundamental analysis to explain cultural background, belief system, web of kinship and other issues that surround Nigerian work environment. In particular, the paper used descriptive and exploratory analysis to analyze civil service rules for various years, operating in Nigerian public administration system to establish some relevant findings and make recommendations for policy action.

Literature Review

Here, we review relevant literature and civil service rules as applicable to Nigerian work environment.

Rules in Public Service

Public Service means any service or employment from a scheduled Public Institution, funded by Government and approved for purposes of pension. Universities are therefore among scheduled Public Institutions.

Employees in the Public Service have to perform with bodies of rules and regulations for it to be able to achieve its corporate objectives and for service to be effectively and efficiently delivered. A community without rules as Aristotle would say must be "one either of gods or beast". Rules not only regulate conduct but also regularize conducts in an organization. In the University System there is no denying the fact that the Registry as the custodian of the Institution's rules and regulations is the engine room of the University, the Bursary is the fuel tank, while the Audit is the speedometer. So if we get the Registry right, the whole system will be right.

According to Oloyede (2012), *"As the custodian of the ideals and values of our Universities and drivers of the Institutional operational goals and objectives, the centrality of the Registry in the University System is certainly incontestable"*.

The Registrar, Bursar or Chief Internal Auditor of today of which most of you are likely to become in future must start now to imbibe the following tripod role of being:

i. **Business Partners to Management** – where you generate strategic initiatives, for the success of the organization;

ii. **Change Agents** - where you assist the University to manage changes brought about by the reality of the current environment and

iii. **Students and Employee advocate** - where you are expected to interface between students, staff and management and still ensure their loyalty and welfare in a symbiotic relationship.

To achieve these, you must acquire the attribute of logical thinking in problem solving and ability to deliver well under pressure.

Even if the workplace does not make serious provision for opinion of some category of staff, but as a senior astute public servant, always document your suggestions and move them through your immediate supervisor.

For those of us in the Registry, we would need to have a cutting-edge competence to be able to function effectively and efficiently in this age of globalization, occasioned by advances in science and technology and the gradual usurpation of the traditional functions of the Registry.

Public Servants in most cases get away with poor service delivery in Nigeria because the public that are expected to be served either do not know that they are entitled to efficient services or do not know how to register their displeasure over poor service delivery. These may have been the reason for the establishment of SERVICOM in all Government Establishments in Nigeria – but how much of SERVICOM principles have we embraced as Senior Public Officers or how effective is SERVICOM even in this University?

Since our career in the Public Service and indeed this University is tied to our conduct, it is important that as Senior Officers we should be very familiar with the body and spirit of the following documents.

- a. The constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria
- b. The Act establishing the University
- c. The Staff Conditions of Service
- d. The University scheme of service
- e. The Financial Regulations
- f. Public Service Rules in Nigeria
- g. The Pension (Reform) Act
- h. Governing Council Regulations
- i. Circulars from Management, Council and Government.

These will enable you understand what constitutes misconduct, how to progress in your career and life on retirement. Let us therefore briefly highlight what constitutes misconduct and serious misconduct as they cut across all Public Service.

Misconduct is defined as a specific act of wrong-doing or an improper behavior which is inimical to the image of the service and which can be investigated and proved. It can lead to termination and retirement from service (FGN, 2008). It includes:

- a. Scandalous conduct such as:
 - i. Immoral behavior
 - ii. Unruly behavior
 - iii. Drunkenness
 - iv. Foul language
 - v. Assault

vi. Battery

- b. Refusal to proceed on transfer or to accept posting
- c. Habitual lateness to work
- d. Deliberate delay in treating official document
- e. Failure to keep records
- f. Unauthorized removal of public records
- g. Dishonesty
- h. Negligence
- i. Membership of cults
- j. Sleeping on duty
- k. Improper dressing while on duty
- l. Hawking merchandise within office premises
- m. Refusal to take/carry out lawful instruction from superior officers
- n. Malingering
- o. Insubordination
- p. Discourteous behavior to the public.

Serious Misconduct however refers to specific act of very serious wrongdoing and improper behavior which is inimical to the image of the service and which can be investigated and if proven, may lead to dismissal. (FGN, 2008)

The difference between Misconduct and Serious Misconduct in most cases is a matter of degree. It includes

- a. Falsification of records
- b. Suppression of records
- c. Withholding of files
- d. Conviction on a criminal charge (other than a minor traffic or sanitary offence or the like)
- e. Absence from duty without leave
- f. False claims against Government Officials
- g. Engaging in partisan political activities
- h. Bankruptcy/serious financial embarrassment
- i. Unauthorized disclosure of official information
- j. Bribery
- k. Corruption
- l. Embezzlement
- m. Misappropriation
- n. Violation of Oath of Secrecy
- o. Action prejudicial to the security of the State
- p. Advance Fee Fraud (Criminal Code 419)
- q. Holding more than one full-time paid job
- r. Nepotism or any other form of preferential treatment
- s. Divided loyalty
- t. Sabotage
- u. Willful damage to Public property
- v. Sexual Harassment; and

- w. Any other act unbecoming of a Public Officer.

Findings and Recommendations for Effective Service Delivery

The need for rules and regulations in an organization cannot be over emphasized. As Administrators or Managers of funds, you must acquaint yourselves with the rudiments of the laws governing your career so that while ensuring loyalty to your superior, you must not fail to always draw his/her attention to extant rules and regulations if the need arises.

If he/she is the difficult type, document your suggestions, forward it to your Supervisor but keep a copy. This saves you from sinking with a difficult Head of Department.

The recommendations listed below may help you as you aspire to the peak of your career.

i. Acquire copies of documents related to rules and regulations governing your career. If the organization cannot provide, Endeavour to procure yours or make photocopy. Most organizations would prefer you to be in ignorance.

ii. Endeavour to participate regularly in relevant orientations and refresher courses to acquaint you with rules and regulations, responsibilities of staff and benefits applicable in the organization. Sponsor yourself if your organization is reluctant, after all the knowledge is yours.

iii. Acquaint yourselves with the rules (written and unwritten) governing your career and internalize good work habits.

iv. Design work target or output for yourself and productivity index for subordinates. This could be daily, weekly or monthly.

v. Initiatives or creative ideas should be documented and forwarded to the next senior officer in the interest of the system.

vi. Unions and Unit heads should ensure that the scheme of Service and Conditions of Service are reviewed and updated regularly.

vii. Team work should always be encouraged. Do not attempt to hide your ignorance but consult others

viii. No matter your status, see yourself as a leader in a way, so show leadership by example and apply sanction when absolutely necessary.

ix. Finally, as a Public Servant, you must have an open heart because you are not just serving humanity but God Himself – know that our creator is seeing you and that the only thing permanent in life is change.

Conclusions

Due to the socio-cultural configuration of the typical Public Servant in Nigeria and the nature of our School System that produces the labor force, we as Administrators are inclined to believe that the most effective way to make the Public Servant efficient is by systematic training and re-training of the staff from the day he/she sets feet in the workplace. Forget all the long and beautiful certificates he/she may present.

As Senior Administrators and Heads of Units, we must appreciate the fact that every new employee consciously or unconsciously maintains certain standards of work output which may be more or less the organizational standard, and if not quickly harnessed may depreciate. It is therefore the role of the organization and Senior Officers to socialize the employees in their departments to meet the organization's realistic target.

Note that as Professional Administrators and Managers of fund in the University, we play key role in the general development of the System. We must therefore invest our time and resources to acquire the knowledge required to move the institution forward. Where the Institution cannot provide all the financial support for this, we should help ourselves rather than remain 'in-situ' and make ourselves irrelevant. It is only when we properly define the organization's goals and work very hard to achieve them that we can hold a place of pride in the system.

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