TEAMWORK AS A STRATEGY FOR ENHANCING PERFORMANCE IN THE NIGERIA PUBLIC SERVICE

VAMBE, JEREMIAH TERSUR
Department of Public Administration
Faculty of Management Sciences
University of Abuja
Email: tervambe@yahoo.com

maii: <u>tervambe@yanoo.con</u> Mobile: 2348060366531

&

OKAFOR IKECHUKWU JOSEPH Department of Public Administration Faculty of Management Sciences University of Abuja Email:josyiyk@yahoo.com

Mobile: 2348036785625

ABSTRACT

Enhancing Public Sector Performance in order to meet the challenges posed by the ever changing environment requires a reshaping of the way work is carried out. That is to say, agencies of government will be made to apply principles and practices which seek to develop the creativity and commitment of employees at all levels. This study examines the potency of teamwork as a strategy for enhancing the performance of employees in the Nigeria Public Service. It is an idea of working together in a group to achieve the same goals and objectives for the good of the service users and organizations in order to deliver a good quality service. Therefore, the study examines the extent to which organizing employees into teams can contribute to the improved service delivery of the Nigeria Public Service. The study was based on qualitative research design. Data was collected from secondary sources including textbooks, Journals and unpublished materials to examine the effects of teamwork on the performance of individual employees as well as the entire performance of the Public Sector in Nigeria. Using Riggs' Ecological approach, the study identified some of the ecological ills that impinge on the performance of Nigeria Public Service to include unequal distribution of service, wide gap between formal expectation and actual behavior, inefficiency in rule application, low morale among employees and political interference. The study revealed that adoption of teamwork as a performance management strategy will enable the public sector to enjoy such advantages as easier problem solving, higher performance by employees. The study concludes that teamwork can lead to improvement of the morale of the workers in the Nigerian Public Sector, which translates into increased performance. The study recommends that teamwork should be encouraged in the Nigerian Public Service as this will help to dislodge the pathologies of Public Sector organizations which has hampered its performance over the years.

KEY WORDS: Public Sector, Teamwork, Performance, Employees.

Introduction

Public Sector organizations the world over, are faced with the challenge to deliver services quickly and flexibly, in order to meet higher and changing demands from clients. This implies that, as the demands of clients are increasing and changing, the organization itself must begin to use more progressive and current tools of organizational practice for it to be able to meet the yearnings and aspirations of the populace.

In Nigeria, one of the factors that affect the performance of the Public Service is its structure. The Nigerian Public Service is model along the Taylorist ideology which work is split up into narrow functions with short, repetitive work cycles (Ogunbameru and Oribabor, 1997). The way work is done is prescribed in detail. The system does not give sufficient room for a process of and innovations, which is particularly necessary for quick change and adaptation. Thus to meet the increasing and changing needs of the populace, Nigerian Public Service must adopt a structure and work process that would involve the workers themselves; and in order to be involved they must have the opportunity to exercise judgment, develop social contacts and learn on the job. Effective and efficient performance of the service will require that agencies of government apply principles and practices which seek to develop the creativity and commitment of employees at all levels so as to meet the service challenges posed by the social, economic and technological environment.

Teamwork is a contemporary organizational practice that can encourage creativity of workers in the Public Sector and increase their commitment to achieve stated objectives. Public Sector performance in Nigeria can be enhanced if agencies of government embrace teamwork as a component of performance strategy- the practice of which will allow employees to carryout responsibilities as teams with a high degree of responsibility and are expected to work with flexibility. This position is predicated on the belief that performance of a team is higher than performance of an individual when there is a work requiring broader scope of knowledge, judgments and opinions (Fleishman and Hunt, 1973; Jones et-al, 2007). According to Peters (1987), to gain the greatest performance, employees should be clearly involved in all aspects of the organizations operations. This paper therefore, builds upon the foundation of established knowledge to examine teamwork as a strategy for enhancing employees' performance in the public service. It seeks to achieve three basic objectives namely: (a) to identify the components of a good work team; (b) to determine how working as a team is related to performance; (c) to make recommendations that will result in the enhancement of teamwork in operations of the Nigeria Public Service.

The paper used qualitative design and is organized into five sections. Section one covers introduction and objectives. Section two consists of methodology. Section three reviews the concept of teamwork as well as performance and provides a theoretical framework. Section four examines the importance of teamwork to Public Sector Performance in Nigeria. Section five contains conclusion and recommendations.

Conceptual Analysis

Teamwork: Scholars differ in their view of what teamwork actually means. Mamzoor et-al, (2011) conceived teamwork as the process of working jointly as a group towards the achievement of a common objective. It is an idea of working together in a group to achieve goals and objectives for the good of the service users and organizations. According to Rabey (2000) employees teamwork constitutes a larger group of people than what job position describes; the essence of teamwork is that workload is reduced and broken into pieces of work for everyone to take part. Studies have shown that teamwork is not only the foundation of successful management, but the means of improving overall results in organizational productivity (Haenisch, 2012). Where teamwork exists, opportunities are provided for a group of employees to work intensely on a specific, common goal using their positive synergy, individual and mutual accountability, and complementary skills.

There are two basic ideas in teamwork. Firstly, every member in the team is important, as he or she is a representation of part of the solution being sought. The ideas from the various members of the team should be collated with the aim of attaining the desired goal. There are various ways in which the ideas of the members towards solving the problem can be collated such as brainstorming sessions, where members state their ideas freely and they are noted down (Jones, et-al, 2007; Marchinston, 2005; Forbel and Hartenian, 2003; Mandel, 2003; Williams, 2003). Secondly, teamwork is an effective means of seeking solutions to conflicts affecting the organization. The team members will have assorted views to the problem and will therefore have different ways of solving it (Mulika, 2010). Conflicts are many and some emerge in pursuit of the goals the organization wants to attain. There can be conflicts where members in a team are not able to agree on the goal that they are seeking to achieve. To avoid the conflicts that might hamper the attainment of the overall objectives, there should be synchronization of the individuals, cooperation and mutual adaption, which are necessary for solving problems. In addition, the team's main objective is the resolution of problems and not the creation of other complications. According to Stanifort (2000) conflicts regarding the given solution to a problem are good as they allow the team to generate other solutions that are better. The presence of conflicts within a team provides the opportunity for them to congregate and discuss the causes of the problem and how it could be resolved.

Teamwork is necessary for the success of any organization. The organization will deliver more for less. The performance of Ministries and Departments (MDAs) of government that constitute the Nigerian Public Sector can be energized by the use of effective teamwork. The challenge faced by the Public Service in Nigeria is to develop the structure, culture and leadership style which will encourage individuals to work as a team to achieve performance improvements. Mulika, (2010) identified three components of good teamwork for organizational culture namely;

- (i) Positive Corporate Culture: For an organization to be able to recruit long-term effective team members, it should have an open and invigorating positive corporate culture. The members of a team can thrive well in an environment where work involves creativity to overcome any challenges that the team may face. Where this does not exist, there is a prevalence of high staff turnover, distrust among employees, negative attitudes. The presence of negative attitudes usually leads to the organization's inability to retain employees or those who remain products of destructive organizational culture. Though all the members of the group should have a positive corporate culture, it should flow from the top management of the department down to the small groups of individuals in the organization. Management can develop good corporate culture in a number of ways such as ensuring that the team's expectations are clear, providing the team members with the authority they need to execute their mandate and supporting and backing up the decisions made by the team members.
- (ii) Recognition: Positive recognition means recognizing outstanding performance in the team, continued performance, and improved performance in the organization.
- (iii) Positive Feedback: this means the results of a team in an organization are measured against the feedback received in the implementation of their findings. Feedback enables the team to weigh the results of its efforts. Where there is no feedback, the team will be confused and therefore fail to focus on its mandate properly which may lead to their inability to meet their expected outcomes as they produce many disappointments.

The advantage of embracing teamwork in the Nigerian Public Service as a component of performance strategy is that there will be a significant improvement in the performance of employees especially in spheres that require creative solving of different task related problems, high degree of adaptability and operative management. It will also create an environment which would facilitate knowledge and information exchange and knowledge sharing. Similarly, it will enhance the capacity of public service in Nigeria to increase the potential for innovation that may add value to services; increase employability of workers through multi-skilling and the acquisition of higher competences in problem solving as well as communication.

Performance: Traditionally, the concept of performance is associated with productivity and visible, or tangible outputs. Olaiye (1999) defines organizational performance as output per labour cost (the ratio of input to output). This definition presents some difficulties when such service organizations as education and health institutions are considered. This is because, whereas the outputs of manufacturing concerns are tangible and measurable, those of service organizations are not, thus making measurement difficult. In view of this limitation, a broad concept of performance that incorporates all segments of work life is therefore, necessary. Mali (1987)'s definition seems to provide this: he conceives performance as ''the measure of how well resources are being brought together in organizations and utilized for accomplishing set of results. It involves reaching the highest level of performance with the least expenditure of resources". In a variant perspective, According to Koontz and O'Donnel (1968), performance is very much related to overall productivity of an individual or an organization. Performance refers to how well a worker, manufacturer, or an organization is doing in relation to intended purposes, objectives, targets and intended accomplishments. It relates to whether intended services have been delivered, intended outcomes or other desired state is achieved, or whether the target problem has been resolved, whether the desired needs have been satisfied and whether services have been satisfactorily provided, in terms of quality and frequency.

Similarly, performance comprises efficiency and effectiveness (Larson, 2003). Thus, performance is seen as a quantitative weighted measure of how efficiency in a given set of resources is used to achieve a given set of objectives or targets. An efficient worker is one that achieves high output with minimum input. Efficiency denotes that the operations, means, activities and resources are so structured and managed such that the output or achievement is maximized or optimized. Efficiency is important because resources are generally limited. Hence organizations and individuals make the most out of the little resources available

to achieve maximum results. Effectiveness on the other hand, refers to the level of attainment or realization of goals and objectives. It denotes how much of objectives, outputs, targets and accomplishment levels have been achieved. It answers the question of whether stated intentions planned or projected output and objectives are realized or not. It relates efforts, activity and output to the desired state of affairs.

Theoretical Framework

In recent times, there have been a growing number of theories that seek to explain the nature of inefficiency in the Nigerian Public Service. This study is guided by the ecological theory and the view of one of its chief proponents Fred Riggs. According to Riggs (1964), the administrative institutions in the developing states are weak because of the ecological constraints that impinge on and prevent them from taking the form or the model of ideal administrative institutions found in the developed States.

One of the theories grouped under Riggs ecological school is prismatic theory which has identified some attributes underdeveloped bureaucracies that impinge negatively on performance (Ezeadi and Edeh, 2007). Here Riggs dwells on poly normativism describing the administrative institutions of developing States as ''Sala'' bureaucracy that lies between the ''Paria'' and ''Office''. Riggs further explained that the inefficiency of the 'Sala'' or rather the administrative institution of developing countries is reinforced by the price indeterminacy of the bazzar canteen, through paria entrepreneurship and intrusive access of the elite by the agglomeration of values, strategic spending and learning as instrument of elite recruitment, poly – communalism and poly normativism (DoubleGist, 2013).

Riggs concluded that the result of the 'bazzar canteen' are inefficiency and ineffectiveness, which the 'Sala Model' is associated with: the transitional society or prismatic society is characterized by lack of division of labour, unequal distribution of service, wide gap between formal expectation and actual behaviour and bureaucratic enclaves dominated by motives of self protection (Ezeali and Edeh, 2007).

A clear observation and study of the environment in which the public sector in Nigeria operate reveals that it is very much characterized with features of the prismatic society. It is observed that the distinguishing characteristics of the ''Sala'' bureaucracy accounts for its dismal weakness in inter – penetration of the elements of tradition and modernity. According to Okapta (2004), this tradition involves communal bonds, based upon diffuse emotional identification and attachment among individuals of which the family and the neighbourhood group may serve as an example. This is equally noticeable in the Nigeria Public Service. More so, forces ranging from over-centralization, lack of patriotism, corruption, Ghost workers syndrome, appointment of unqualified and in experienced officials, bribery, lack of proper maintenance of men and material; and political interference weaken public sector performance in Nigeria. These factors constitute the environment in which the Nigeria Public Service operates and which have equally hindered development. Thus, in order to enhance public sector performance in Nigeria, there is need to identify and provide for more efficient ways of organizing works processes and increasing the commitment of employees.

Public Sector Performance in Nigeria

The Public Sector refers to all organizations that exist as part of government machinery for implementing policy decisions and delivering services that are of value to citizens. It is a mandatory institution under the Nigerian Constitution of 1999. Chapter VI of the Constitution, Executive Part1 (D) and Part II © provide for a public service at the federal and state levels of government. The Public Sector in Nigeria is made up of: (i) The Civil Service, which is often referred to as the core service and is composed of line ministries and extra-ministerial agencies; and (2) The Public Bureaucracy, which is composed of the enlarged public service, including: (a) Services of the State and National Assemblies (b) The Judiciary (c) The Armed forces (d) The Police and other security agencies (e) Paramilitary services (Immigration, Customs, Prisons, etc); (f) 'Parastatals' and agencies including social service, commercially oriented agencies, regulatory agencies, educational institutions, research institutes, etc (CFRN, 1999).

It is obvious that Nigeria has a large Public Sector with large personnel. Their major function is to implement government policies and programmes. While it is true that some governments did or do not have any programme for the common good, the public sector has not successfully implemented the policies and programmes of those that did. Many civil servants found it easier to align themselves with the government of the day and participate in treasury looting that has reduced Nigeria to an embarrassment among the comity of serious nations (Suleiman, 2014).

There is significant evidence to suggest that the Public Service in Nigeria has not delivered on the purposes for which it was established. With several cases of building collapse, plane crash, moribund refineries and the resultant importation of Petroleum products into the country by the Federal Government

and so on as witnessed in recent times, the Public Sector cannot untie itself the shackle of poor performance necessitated by inefficiency and ineffectiveness. Management inertia has been identified by Researchers and Practitioners as one of the factors that is responsible for poor performance in the Public Sector. Former President Olusegun Obasanjo while introducing a set of Public Service Reforms in 2003 observed inter-alia:

Nigerians have too long been feeling short-changed by the quality of public service. Our public offices have too long been showcases for combined evils of inefficiency and corruption, whilst being impediments for effective implementation of government policies. Nigerians deserve better, and I will ensure they they get what is better (Obasanjo, 2003).

The aftermath of this was the invention of series of reforms which led to privatization, downsizing and right-sizing of the Public Service and even minimizing the role of the Public Sector in the National life. .

The Nigerian Public Service has undergone changes and transformation over the years; unfortunately, successive reforms have not made significant impact to reengineer the Public Sector. Reforms were tailored towards achieving efficiency and effectiveness of the service on the understanding that a thorough-bred Public Service was necessary for efficient delivery of public service. Again, the public sector has continuously failed to deliver. Adamolekun in a Survey conducted in 2005 captured this development when he categorizes Nigeria as one of the 'hesitant reformers', alongside Cote d'Ivoire, Gabon, Guinea, Togo, Zimbabwe. This survey may be controversial but the essential point has been made: the rate of reform execution in the Nigeria Public Service is lackluster. It is very difficult to compare Nigeria, for instance, with other countries like Botswana and South Africa whose Public Services are much more effective and efficient. The Public Service in Nigeria is generally criticized, among others for being too bureaucratic, too conservative and there are conduct derived from colonial based civil service which was designed just to make law and order. Furthermore, inadequate co-ordination, communication gap, over centralization of decision making, non-application of reforms reports has marred efficiency and effectiveness of the Nigeria Public Service (Double Gist, 2013).

The above constitutes the environment in which the Nigeria Public Service operates and which has equally hindered development. Therefore, the need to identify and provide for more efficient ways of handling the Public Service becomes imperative.

Teamwork and Public Sector Performance in Nigeria

There are many benefits for adoption of teamwork in the Nigerian Public Service. Group work can increase morale of employees and make them to work even harder while affecting the output of the organization positively. Through teamwork employees can obtain the necessary skills for better individual performance. As rightly observed by Forbel and Marchington (2005), organizations that have embraced teamwork have recorded improved performance. Teamwork can increase the level of job satisfaction among employees in the Nigerian Public Service. Teamwork is about workers working in a team and as a group towards the attainment of common goal. Although, this kind of approach has some challenges as well as benefits, Fleishman (1973) notes that there is a relationship between job satisfaction and team work. If teams work well, have a common goal, are autonomous in their decision-making, and have responsibility and support, teamwork becomes a valuable experience for workers involved. Working in a team empowers people and helps them develop autonomy, which is a source of profound job satisfaction and reduces stress (Fleishman, 1973). Thus, if teamwork increases employee's job satisfaction, then embracing it as management strategy will improve the productivity of the employee in the Nigeria public service. Teamwork in the Nigerian Public Service will lead to the satisfaction of the employees making them feel motivated to execute their various duties. The success of the Nigerian Public Service is possible if the right team that can work effectively through cooperation and teamwork is selected. Knowing the right process of selecting the appropriate members of a team is crucial because no matter how hard the team works if it does not compromise the right people success can hardly be achieved. Selecting the wrong team is a certain way to failing in its objective. Many companies use the self-directed format of teamwork to perform better. In this format, the group leader is either assigned by the management or elected by members. The leader must be effective for him or her to stimulate improved performance and completion of the project at hand.

Despite the importance of team Mulika (2010), admits that it is not easy to teach individuals on how to work in a team. This is because teaching individuals to work in a team goes beyond the limits of any traditionally based training as it involves the training of only the skills that can facilitate teamwork and

the internal working of individuals. Teaching teamwork to individuals therefore involves innovative didactic techniques similar to techniques of experimental learning. For delivery of the required results in relation to performance of a team, there is need to specify skills necessary for working in a team. Where such skills are deficient, the employees should be trained on how they can perform better as a team and therefore enable the agencies of government meet their set strategic objectives.

There are arguments that teamwork may have detrimental effects on workers by increasing workrelated health problems and the risk of occupational hazards (Mulika, 2010). The performance of employees in the Nigerian Public Service can be enhanced through job rotation and greater responsibility of employees for quality of the services offered. The rotation of employees on their jobs and rapid organizational changes that are facilitated by work processes that are flexible can reduce the chances of workers to improve their safety through routines at work and learning while at work. The introduction of new forms of work organization will lead to an increase in workload and time pressure caused by shortage of employees and other problems that are technical. While agreeing that the negative consequences of teamwork can bring an organization to its kneels, the fact remains that all organizations are finding teamwork to be of great importance to daily activities particularly in the performance of individual employees and eventually the whole organization (Mulika, 2010). In organizations where teamwork has been implemented successfully, their operations are done with high speed an more efficiently. According to Aichouni (2005) man is a being that is not able to exist without the aid and assistance of fellow men. Therefore, teamwork in the Nigerian Public Service is as crucial as the mutual interactions of man with others. The work environment in the Nigeria Public Service should be a secured one in which the members of staff are friendly to one another and they render support to one another whenever it is needed. For a team to be a success there has to be politeness and respect as the basic conditions. Teamwork thrives on communication, conflict resolution and cooperation among staff members.

Conclusion

In this study, the need for a new work organization implementation has been stressed with the aim to increase work flexibility and social responsibility of the Nigeria Public Service towards employees by enhancing their professional and personal development. Teamwork is considered by the study as one of the core elements of this new work organization. The advantage of teamwork is significant improvement in organizational performance especially in the spheres that require solving of tasks related problems, high degree of adaptability and operative management. Adoption of .teamwork as a performance management strategy will help the Nigerian Public Service to dislodge the pathologies of Public Sector organizations that hampered its performance over the years.

Recommendations

Based on issues discussed and findings established, the following recommendations are made:

- 1. There is need for value re-orientation in the Nigeria Public Service and institutionalization of organizational culture that support teamwork which creates a spirit of mutual trust, respect and cordial relationship between the superiors and subordinates; encouraging two way communications between the superior and the subordinates.
- 2. In order to cope with the ever changing demands of clients and the environment in general, Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) of Government should create regular training programmes for employees to increase learning and mode of performing various tasks. This will help to reduce the pressure on meeting deadlines.
- 3. It is also important to develop such an atmosphere where public servants are well satisfied with their jobs. In this way, they will be in position to utilize their full potential which is capable of building team spirit and performance.
- 4. To improve the outcome of teamwork and eliminate the negative consequences, the management of the Public Service should initiate the reward system to the exemplary teams. Recognition of efforts will not only motivate the team participants, but it will also create a sense of competitiveness in the organization thereby making every member active. The overall effect is the improved performance of the employees and the organization. There should be some funds set aside specifically to motivate the employees in various teams in different agencies of government that constitute the Service.
- 5. Communication is very important in the success of teamwork. The organization culture in the Nigerian Public Sector should encourage communication among management and employees.

Communication will enhance the learning environment while strengthening the relations between employees and the management. Effective communication encourages consultations as a crisis and problem solving mechanism. In addition, employees will actively participate in brainstorming debates that will yield to better strategic decisions in the Public Service. Effective communication in the Public Service will ensure that the Management obtains feedback on every issue on service delivery. The availability of feedback will enable the management to know the level of satisfaction with service delivery and therefore develop the necessary strategies to improve where they have failed.

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