



STATE OF PUBLIC SERVICE DELIVERY IN NIGERIA AND ATTITUDE TO PUBLIC WORK: A CRITICAL REFLECTION ON THE NEXUS

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Abstract:

Given the increasing range of demands for effective public service delivery in Nigeria and the contrarily dwindling performance of the public service, the study reflected critically on the extent to which attitudes of Public Servants towards Public Service accounts for the poor public service delivery. In doing this, content analysis technique was adopted as the research methodology. The key conclusion is that there is prevailing negative attitude to public service by public servants in Nigeria and this largely explains the poor performance of the public service in Nigeria. Along the line of this conclusion, it is recommended that government should build in the Nigerian public servants a positive attitude to work, put in place favourable public service environment, ensure regular capacity building for the public servants, ensure regular and effective performance appraisal to always ensure that promotion, advancement and commendation among public servants are based on merit and to put in place a reliable and effective retirement benefits.

Key words: Public service, values, attitude, public servants, Nigeria.

Introduction

Public services are usually provided by government within the framework of public organizations. The public organizations which are in essence public bureaucracies and in the sense conceptualized by Max Weber are characterized by specific set of structural arrangements, specific set of principles, rules and regulations that define and guide duties. Very importantly, public bureaucracy is characterized by specific patterns of behaviour, conducts or attitudes. These specific characteristics, according to Michael (1963) and Uduma (2003), enables public organizations to effectively and efficiently deliver public goods and services to the citizens. Specifically, for instance, the existence of rules, and procedures and the requirement of obedience to them help in ensuring control and orderliness. The existence of structures and hierarchy ensures separation of powers, checks and balances; the requirement of impersonal attitude enhances fairness in the exercise of administrative powers while the requirement of politically neutral attitude ensures loyalty of the public servants to any government in power and sustained or uninterrupted public service delivery. In essence, if the public service organizations in Nigeria are actually characterized by such mentioned features, their delivery of public services would be effective and efficient. As it is today in Nigeria, there is apparently poor public service



delivery. This situation in many scholarly research works has been found to be largely attributable to negative attitude to public service (Daily trust, 2015; Obiora, 2015). The poor public service delivery too been observed as accounting for the low socio-economic development in Nigeria as evidenced in the stagnant or dwindling condition of living in Nigeria. This situation is affirmed in the research findings of scholars like Denin (2007), Dike (2003) and also in the Institution works of the United Nations (2011), United Nations (2012), World Bank (2005) and World Bank (2008).

In the context of this scenario, the paper critically examined the rising and disturbing public service inefficiency and its relationship with the negative attitude to public work in Nigeria. In doing this, the paper was structured into five parts as follows (i) Introduction (ii) Methodology (iii) Definition of key terms (iv) Brief Literature review on key public work values, principles and attitudes (v) Discourse of the prevailing attitude to public service in Nigeria (vi) Recommendations (vii) Conclusion

Methodology: The study is largely theoretical or conceptual in nature and data or information for discussion, analysis and conclusion drawn from secondary sources of data collection.

Definition of Key terms:

1. **Attitude:** Attitude is an established way of thinking or feeling towards something that is typically reflected in a person's behaviour. An attitude is also conceived as the way a person expresses or applies his values through words or actions. Often, a person's action or behaviour is the result of his or her attitude that he or she has towards something. Attitude is also seen as the disposition or the spirit which underlies one's behaviour or actions. Attitude is also seen as temperament that can change according to circumstances, events or environment. An attitude towards something could be a negative or a positive one. In any society, behaviours are guided by attitudes and attitudes emanates from values. Positive attitude connotes, in the context of public service, caring, upbeat and optimistic approach to public service functions and activities.
2. **Values:** Values are the principles or standards that guide judgment about what is good or bad. It is the enduring beliefs that influence the choices people make among available means and ends of action. Values define people's attitude and presents a bias as to how people see things. Values are germane to all aspects of public sector work and provides a framework for activities and decisions. Thus, values provide a foundation for the achievement of public service objectives which, fundamentally, is effective public service delivery for development and improvement in the standard of life of the citizens.
3. **Public Service:** Public service is the service which is provided by government to the people living within its jurisdiction either directly through the public sector or indirectly through financing provision of services. Public services are provided within the framework of public organizations. Public services include services provided by government in the areas of health, education, infrastructure, security, power, communication, transportation et ce' tera.



Brief literature review on values, attitudes and public service.

All public service decisions, actions and activities according to Hofstede (2005) and Schein (2004) are value based. They, indeed, argue that peoples' values are in one way or the other realized or expressed in public service decisions and activities. Bozeman (2007) observe too that public servants share the values of the wider society. This entails that the values of the wider society significantly pervades the values of public servants as expressed in public sector work contexts. Such values too shapes the attitude of public servants, underpins their actions, inactions and their behaviour.

Some values as they are, are supportive of efficient and effective functioning of public service, while some are not. The United nations (1996) identified and prescribed some values or principles that are supportive of effective public service and that are, as such, needed to guide public servants in their public service activities. These principles include:

1. Trust: This implies that public servants have the duty to act in public interest and their ultimate loyalty should be to the public interest.
2. Effective and efficient performance of public duties: This implies that public servants should ensure that they perform their duties effectively and efficiently and with integrity.
3. Impartiality and Fairness in Performance of Functions: This implies that public servants should be attentive, fair and avoid any undue preferential treatment to any group or individual or abuse the power and authority vested in them in their official duties.

Sherman (1998:15) in his review of public sector codes and principles identified the following as the most common values or principles:

– honesty and Integrity

- Impartiality
- Respect for the law
- Diligence
- Economy and effectiveness
- Responsiveness
- Accountability

Similarly OECD (2000) in a cross national study of public service ethics identified impartiality, legality and integrity as the most frequently stated core public service values.

Kernaghan (2003:712) in his study on public service values and ethics found out four categories of values that are usually very central in public sector values. These values are as indicated below:



Table 1: Categories of public service values

Ethical	Democratic	Professional	People
Integrity	Rule of law	Effectiveness	Caring
Fairness	Neutrality	Efficiency	Fairness
Accountability	Accountability	Service	Tolerance
Loyalty	Loyalty	Leadership	Decency
Excellence	Openness	Excellence	Compassion
Respect	Responsiveness	Innovation	Courage
Honesty	Representativeness	Quality	Benevolence
Probity	Legality	Creativity	Humanity

Source: Kernaghan (2003:712)

Toonen (2003) in his own study identified rather three categories of values around which core values in public administration are situated. These, according to him, are:

1. Parsimony and Economy: The Values in this category are concerned with ensuring optimal and efficient use of resources.
2. Fairness, equity and rectitude: The values in this category are concerned with honesty and development of public trust in government and governance.
3. Robustness, resilience and sustainability: The Values in this category are concerned with ensuring that public administration and government are strong in the face of various pressures but are flexible enough to learn and adapt to changing circumstances in order to maintain public confidence.

Murris (2008) in his study of Irish public service identified honesty, impartiality, accountability, integrity, fairness and loyalty as key values in Irish public service. He argued in the study that values are instrumental in determining, guiding and informing public servants' attitude to their public service functions and duties. In essence, public service values remains fundamental to all aspects of governance and public administration. Bozeman (2007) underscores this points in his comment that there is no more important topic in Public administration than public values.

In Nigeria, public service official documents like the Code of Conduct, Bureau and Tribunal Act, the Civil Service Rules and Financial Regulations as well as some commentaries on Nigeria public service, values such as honesty, transparency, impartiality accountability and courtesy emerge as defining the Nigerian public service system.

In summary, values within the society invariably informs public service values provide the underlying force for individual and group attitudes or specific sector actions including the public service sector. The public servants' attitude ultimately affect the performance of the public service system.

Negative attitude and poor public service delivery in Nigeria

Arguably, the disturbing problem of poor public service delivery in Nigeria is attributable to negative attitude to public service. Generally, for instance, the failure or unwillingness to



follow rules and regulations by the public servants in Nigeria arguable too are matters of attitude. It is not that public servants in Nigeria are unaware of the desired principles that should guide their decisions and actions in public service. The issue is fundamentally that they are not keen to keep to the necessary attitude to public work. Hence they continue to display negative attitude to work in the sense of not:-

1. performing their duties in strict impersonal manner devoid of emotion.
2. being guided and controlled by the ethics of public service.
3. being transparent and accountable in official conducts
4. being politically neutral in the sense of serving faithfully any government in power not minding its party platform.
5. being committed in implementing official decisions.
6. keeping away personal interests, prejudice and the influence of primordial interests, in the conduct of official functions.
7. working with real national or patriotic spirit
8. Properly handling government property
9. coming to work and leaving office at the appropriate or schedules times.
10. acting fairly and justly to clients and colleagues.
11. relating their individual self worth to the way they respectively perform their public duties
12. displaying nepotistic and self seeking dispositions or tendencies in public duties
13. displaying and prebendal attitudes corrupt
14. being disciplined in the conduct of official duties
15. being motivated by public interest in the performance of their official duties. (Makinde, 2005; Bernard and Oyende, 2015; Amucleazu, 1980; Takaya, 1985).

In all, these prevailing attitudes among Nigeria public servants have implications to the effective functioning of the nation's public service. It is noteworthy that Public servants who demonstrate positive attitudes towards their job typically respect the rules of the work, adhere to ethical standards and exercise discipline at all times. It follows, therefore, that evolving and sustaining positive attitude among the public servants in Nigeria is a sine qua-non to enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of the public service in Nigeria. Indeed, even with the best of skills, knowledge and expertise that public servants may have, they still need to, very importantly, have positive attitude public service delivery in Nigeria is to be enhanced.

Recommendations

1. Basically Government has the task of ensuring that the right attitude by public servants are developed and that they actually put them into practice in their public works and functions. The renewal, re-examination and reforming of such attitudes is necessary too for the development of the Nigerian administrative system and the public servants themselves.



2. The Bureaucratic Leadership in the public service should realize that it is the key cohort in the development and sustenance of the desired attitude to public service. They must, in this direction, know that the maxim, “do as I do not as I say” is of utmost relevance here. Indeed, Leaders (both bureaucratic and political ones) need to influence their subordinates more through their actions and less through just mere verbal advocacy of the right attitudes. The conduct of leaders in decision making and execution do have far more pronounced effect on the attitude of the subordinate staffs than mere verbal advocacy of positive attitude to work.
3. Regular workshops, trainings or retreats on requisite public service attitudes is necessary as they offer public servants the opportunity to explore the meaning, relevance, essence and practical application of positive attitudes in everyday work place contexts.
4. Government must put in place an effective reward system for public servants who put up positive attitude to public service as such would motivate them to do more. In this direction too, government must also create frameworks and practices that must convince public servants that they will certainly be comfortably on their gratuity and pensions after putting in their best for 35 years or more in the public service.
5. There is the need for the involvement of committed leadership at both the political and bureaucratic levels as such leaders are usually the driving force for the development and substance of right attitude to public service.
6. There is also the need for enhancing the conduciveness of public work environment or condition particularly by ensuring job security, fair remuneration and the existence of good working offices.
7. Government at the three tiers of government in Nigeria need to regularly embark on moral campaign calling for disciplined behaviour and practice of moral values and positive attitude among public servants.
8. Public organizations must ensure regular performance appraisal and merit based promotion. These practices and efforts would help to develop and sustain the necessary positive attitudes in the public servants in Nigeria.

Conclusion:

Any nation that desires efficient and effective public service system must appreciate the prime place of positive attitude among the public servants to public work. Nigerian government must, as such, develop and enforce strategies to break the prevailing negative attitudes and in their place develop, plant and sustain attitudes that are supportive of achieving its desired pace of development. Indeed the development of Nigeria will be enhanced to the extent that Nigerians public servants develop and imbibe positive attitude to public service.



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