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- Corporate Governance and Financial Performance of Non-financial Firms in Nigeria.
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THE WEBERIAN BUREAUCRATIC PRINCIPLES AND NIGERIAN PUBLIC BUREAUCRACY: AN EVALUATION BY

JIDE IBIETAN AND SAMUEL ONI

ABSTRACT

The objective of this paper is to highlight and reinforce the indispensability of the Weberian bureaucratic principles to the effective functioning of public sector organisation. Weber's theoretisation on bureaucracy had suffered numerous damaging criticisms from scholars; however, the contributions remain unassailable. Using this model as benchmark, the paper attempted an evaluative excursion of the Nigerian Public Service and examined the extent of conformity with the principles in practice. The paper observed that the search for efficiency in the Nigerian public bureaucracy has been a very tall task with one reform committee replacing the other from 1934 to date. The noticeable features of the various reform efforts via their reports are attempts at organizational/institutional development and measures targeted at enhancing managerial capacity. Weber's characterization (legal rational authority) of bureaucracy underscores the essence of these reform initiatives and it also constitutes the fulcrum of the Nigerian public bureaucracy. The paper recommended among others, the objective implementation of measures aimed at improving efficiency in the public service, zeroing-in on entrenching merit while seeking to preserve federal character in appointments and promotions.

INTRODUCTION

The Nigerian Public Service, otherwise known as the Nigerian Bureaucracy is a child of the British Colonial Public Service. In other words, the present arrangement of ministries, departments and agencies of government derived largely from the British system of colonial administration. At its inception, the British civil service had two broad objectives namely, to maintain law and order which Adamolekun (2000) euphemistically captured as the concept of "night watchman". The other objective which Onimode (1983) in Ezeh (2008:318) referred to as revenue generation found expression in the utilization of the public service and its personnel to exploit and expropriate local or indigenous natural and mineral resources to develop the metropole. Frank (1972) epitomized this metropole-hinterland relationship in his centre-periphery model of the dependency theory.

Following the 1914 Amalgamation of Southern and Northern Nigeria and the Lagos colony, two levels of administration existed. "Lord Lugard was, on one hand, directly responsible for fashioning and supervising the British politics of oppression, particularly as it affected difficult and non-complying communities and,... administrative matters in which Lugard was directly in charge of, together with few British officials" (Ezeh, 2008:318). The exploitative motive of the colonialists seems obvious from the numerous scholarly accounts and as reinforced by the centre-periphery model highlighted above.

The major structural division of personnel in the Nigerian public service corresponded to the 1954 Gorsuch (Report) classification which are as follows: Administrative/Professional class; Higher/Technical Executive; Clerical/Artisan; and messengerial/manipulative. These categorization which have been slightly modified due to successive reforms explain the academic standards/requirements pursuant to entry into such grades.

The Nigerian Bureaucracy performs a number of functions. One of such is the provision of services that are deemed to be of necessity and which would otherwise have been outside the reach of the common man. An example of public goods/services, which requires tremendous improvement at the moment is the basic health care for the citizenry. Access to and quality of basic health care delivery have collapsed to the extent that Mimiko (2010:12) painfully but factually referred to each household in Nigeria as operating a micro-municipal governance system. Under this system, each household or unit generates its electricity via generator, water from boreholes, disposes its domestic wastes and attends to its health care needs through private clinics or pay for drugs in government hospitals.

Another public good or function of the public sector that had been taken for granted over the years due to lack of lustre performance of its apparatus and personnel is security. Recent news from various media (print and electronic) confirm how cheap life has become in our nation as innocent lives are lost in very horrible and avoidable circumstances. Functional and qualitative education also constitutes one of the perceived roles of the Nigerian public service, notwithstanding that the country continues to perform poorly on every available indicator of the Human Development Index. Other sundry services include provision of potable/drinking water; reliable public electricity supply; efficient and just judicial administration to mention but a few. The extent to which these services have been delivered is subject to debate.

An important function of the Nigerian Bureaucracy is that it acts as agent of development. This is predicated on its potentials at marshalling human and materials resources required for economic growth and development. The role of public service in collecting data; disseminating information and ideas; analyzing data for policy

decisions; weighing alternatives (including costs and benefits) and proffering possible courses of action are essentially noteworthy in this regard.

The Nigerian Bureaucracy has witnessed phenomenal growth in size, with a total staff strength of less than 30,000 at independence, it grew to 45,154 in 1970; 98,877 in 1974; 213,802 in 1988; 273,392 in 1990; and about 200,000 in 1998 (Obi, 2007:21). In explaining this geometric growth, Abdulsalami (1988:49) adduced the following reasons: the attainment of independence in 1960 with its attendant high expectations for rapid socio-economic development in the country necessitated the creation of several institutions. Secondly, the creation of states from the old regional structures in 1967, and further sub-divisions in 1976, 1991 and thereafter brought about the need for more hands in the services of the states' bureaucracy. Additionally, the massive increase in oil revenues from 1972 enabled the Federal Government to embark on very many developmental projects/programmes necessitating the expansion of existing bureaucracies and the creation of new ones. The perpetration of military rule for over three decades since independence has led to the dominance of the central government in the affairs of this country with the attendant consequences of more bureaus requiring personnel.

The Nigerian Bureaucracy and Max Weber's Ideal Construct: an Evaluation

Having laid the above background, it is proper at this point to explore Max Weber's ideal construct and principles for comparative purposes with the Nigerian Bureaucracy. Max Weber (1864-1920) directed the attention of mankind to why leaders expect compliance with orders given to their subordinates. This coincided with the three types of authority namely: traditional; charismatic and rational-legal. Most of Weber's writings centred on the rational-legal

authority which he described as the "ideal type". Authority rests in the positions in accordance with formalized rules and regulations. The ability to reward for good works or punish for wrongdoings is viewed as legitimate, while the presence of experts/professionals in organizations legitimize the position of office holder.

Weber visualized that "an impersonal, rule-abiding, efficient, merit-based career service provided the surest way of fulfilling the public interest" (Henry, 1999:55). In other words, to achieve the greatest good for a large number of people, merit must be given prominence for tenure jobs, and a body of rational laws formulated by experts who must be impersonal in their approach to official duties are indispensable. These rational laws according to Weber are to replace "Kadijustice" or justice based on the whims and caprices of a charismatic leader.

The features of bureaucracy (rational-legal authority) based on Weber's "ideal construct" are as follows:

- Hierarchy which implies structure
- Promotion based on professional merit and skill as guides for recruitment.
- The development of a career service in the bureaucracy.
- Impersonality of relationships among career professionals in the bureaucracy and with their clientele (Henry, 1999:54-55).
- Specialization along functional lines
- Authority and responsibility.
- Documentation or record keeping.

In an earlier section of this paper, the structure of the Nigerian bureaucracy was traced to the Gorsuch Commission of 1954-55 (Report) classification namely: Administrative/Professional; Higher/Technical Executive; Clerical/Artisan; and Messengerial/Manipulative (Anazodo, Okoye & Chukwuemeka,

2012). These classifications were broadly referred to as Senior Service (which the Europeans dominated during the colonial epoch) and the Junior Service (largely made up of Africans). A University degree or membership of Professional body was the minimum requirement for entry into the Senior Service. Jain in Abdulsalami (1998:48) observed that "the classification within the higher civil service was based not on any rational formula of duties or functions, but on the basis of their recruitment along racial lines". The emphasis here is that under colonial rule, colour as opposed to merit (as canvassed by Max Weber) was used in appointing personnel into the higher service. The implication of this is that the Whiteman believes that colour conferred superior intellect on him, which is a fallacy. It must however be underscored that whatever may be the merit or demerit of the colonial practice in the Nigerian Bureaucracy, there was hierarchy or structure as presented above, and this conforms to one of the features of Weber's ideal type bureaucracy. The structure remains with slight amendment (up till moment) as a result of several civil service reforms highlighted in the subsequent segments of this paper.

One other feature of Weber's ideal construct on bureaucracy is that promotion must be based on professional merit and skills as guides for recruitment. A major issue explaining the rationale for most of the civil service reforms is on increasing efficiency in the Nigerian Public Service, and it is gratifying to observe that some of the reform panels (Udoji, 1973/74 and Ani, 1975/76) underscored this issue while zeroing-in on training as a step towards improving performance in the public service. However, institutional and cultural problems have combined to weaken the effectiveness and efficiency of the Civil Service reforms. The misuse of the federal character principle, for instance (which in truth and reality is meant to achieve proportional representation in the public service), has been observed to sacrifice merit in favour of quota in the Nigerian

Bureaucracy (Briggs, 2007, Gberevbie, 2010). The 1994 Ayida Review Panel on 1988 Civil Service Reforms observed this state of affairs and recommended that recruitment into the public service, "especially at entry grade of professional cadres should as much as practicable be based on a combination of merit and federal character, so that the best candidates from each state are selected on a purely competitive basis" (Obikeze and Obi, 2004:159). Copious references on other forms of abuse of office and bureaucratic corruption in the recruitment and promotion processes are contained in Obikeze, 2007:48. Similarly, the Administration Staff College of Nigeria (ASCON) has the original mandate of promoting and encouraging the acquisition of skills to improve the competence of bureaucrats. The pursuit of internally generated revenue, extortions, fraudulent manipulations, antics and spurious claims have however, severely undermined and detracted the institute from making significant impact on public service competence in Nigeria (Talabi, 2012; Akume, 2012). Corruption and pervasive institutional impunity and fraudulent tendencies have continued to stand as sore thumbs in the achievement of the lofty expectations of these institutional reforms and thwart the realization of efficiency and high performance in the civil service (Mukoro, 2005; Anazodo, Okoye & Chukwuemeka, 2012). As observed by Okotoni & Erero (2005) and Akume (2012), the prevailing public servants detestable economic, social, psychological and environmental challenges have undermined the underlining objectives of administrative reforms of enhancing bureaucratic capacity and competence via training as envisaged by government in Nigeria.

Another feature of bureaucracy according to Max Weber is the development of a career service within the public service. One striking feature of the 1988 Civil Service Reforms is the professionalization of the civil service in the sense that posting of officers from one ministry to another should stop and officers are

encouraged to make a career in a Ministry or Department of his/her choice (Abdulsalami, 1998:51). The retention of the personnel management board (Obikeze and Obi, 2004:158) in each ministry by the Ayida panel that reviewed the 1988 reform is a testimony to efforts at professionalizing the Nigerian Bureaucracy.

The General Orders, Financial Memoranda and other instruction manuals for public service as handed over from the British administration in Nigeria, with updates and reviews metamorphosed into the Public Service Rules, Financial Orders, and lately the Procurement and Due Process Acts which govern activities in the public sector bear convergence with Weber's bureaucratic feature of reliance on and use of rules and regulations that must be rational and scientific. This is amply demonstrated by the application of the above mentioned documents in the Nigerian Public Service. To be sure, these documents (under reference) also spell out the pattern of relationships among personnel in the Nigerian Bureaucracy and their clients. Sanctions are imposed in cases of contravention of the rules by appropriate units of the public service or agency(ies) of government. The role of the Civil Service Commission and office of the Head of Service of the Federation (among others) cannot be overemphasized in this regard. It should be noted that the obsolete or anachronistic nature of some of these rules require that they should be tinkered with and aligned to meet the challenges and realities of work relations, situations and procedure in the 21st Century public administration system.

The Nigerian Bureaucracy is structured hierarchically to give each office holder, especially in the administrative/professional cadre, the authority required to discharge the responsibilities attached to the office. It is to this end that controls (administrative, legislative and judicial) are built into public administration in Nigeria. The roles played by the judiciary (hierarchy of courts); National

Assembly and State Houses of Assembly; Public Complaints Commission; anti-graft agencies come into sharp focus here. Thus, it can be safely affirmed that the Nigerian Bureaucracy conform to the Weberian model of bureaucracy.

A final feature of Weber's ideal construct is that bureaucracy must be based on proper documentation or record keeping. This appears to be one of the most visible activities of the Nigerian public service. Letters, memoranda, circulars, minutes of meetings and other official means of communication are produced, filed and arranged orderly to guide actions, decisions and government business. Government activities are based on formal and written procedure than on oral methods/means of communication, in order to avoid the possibility of denials. Record keeping ensures permanence, stability and continuity. Through these attributes of documentation, it becomes easier to formulate policies based on reliable data. However, the extent to which data guide decisions or policies in the Nigerian public life constitute another topic for research. It has also been alleged that record keeping and handling generally in recent times tend to be sloppy and would require public sector managers to institute and beef up actions in this respect.

To reiterate, it is the search for efficiency that explains the essence of one civil reform after the other, and we have had several including Tudor Davies commission (1945); Walter Harragin (1947); Hugh Foot (1948); Gorsuch (1954); Mbanefo (1959); Morgan (1964); Adebo (1971); Udoji (1974); Onosode (1982); Dotun Philips (1988); Ayida Panel (1994); and Obasanjo Service Delivery Reform (2003) (Obi and Dalhatu, 2007:23; Nnamani, 2009:207). These reforms did not only affect the civil service in isolation, but public enterprises as well. For instance, it is through the intervention of these commissions of enquiry that the public enterprises experienced rapid growth in Nigeria between 1970 and 1980.

Similarly, it is through their intervention that government began to think of divestment (Privatizing) of public enterprises, and this (privatization and commercialization) reached its crescendo during the Obasanjo civilian administration between 1999 and 2007. Details of these are contained in Obikeze and Obi, 2004:248-275. All these are efforts/attempts at organizational development which constitute one level of administrative development.

The second area that characterizes the process of administrative development is attempts at developing managerial capacity (skills) within the public sector. It is, however, not very easy separating activities related to organizational and structural development from activities aimed at improving managerial capacity. This is because all panels or commissions which have looked at the performance of the civil service and public enterprises have always included recommendations for improving managerial effectiveness. Looking at the documents of the various commissions, it is possible to identify certain broad areas of action which they recommended for improving efficiency in the civil service. Udoji, in his recommendations, highlighted the following: that the concept of result-oriented management be adopted; a unified structure be introduced; "administration" be transformed into 'management'; pay be made dependent upon job content and performance; promotion be based on merit and not seniority; public sector compensation be made commensurate to private sector remuneration; financial management be strengthened and modernized; personnel management practice be modernized (Obikeze and Obi, 2004:153).

In addition to the above recommendations, the Udoji report recommended the adoption of Management By Objectives (MBO) as a system of operation in the public service. This was calculated to introduce an efficiency criterion in public sector management and

the salary awards (increment) were meant to justify a harder working bureaucracy. The commission stressed the need for further training of civil/public servants. In this case, training was to be essentially in-service.

The Michael Ani Panel (1975/76) reinforced vital aspects of Jerome Udoji's report by attempting to uphold a system of Planning, Programming, and Budgeting System, (PPBS) in order to foster a development oriented public service. This system carries along with it the need not only for programme budgeting system based on current costs or prices as opposed to incremental Budgeting (TBS) which obtained in the civil service.

Subsequent reform/review panels such as that of Gamaliel Onosode (1982) endorsed most of these earlier recommendations. In addition, the Onosode report raised a fundamental issue concerning efficiency in the public sector compared to the private sector. He therefore recommended privatizing publicly controlled enterprises based on the assumption that as private enterprises, they would be better managed.

The 1988 Civil Service reforms made the underlisted striking innovations in the Nigerian bureaucracy targeted at enhancing performance: introduction of the elongated salary structure along with improved allowances in housing, transportation and lunch subsidy for some category of workers. Professionalisation of the civil service was introduced to ensure that officials in the service make a career in a particular area, for example in Finance; Personnel; Planning, Research and statistics or other core professions. This was calculated at producing skilled and specialized individuals for effective/better performance.

Additionally, the 1988 reforms aimed at introducing the concept of team management. This refers essentially to the neutralization of the

role of Permanent Secretaries which hitherto had been preponderant. The Directors-General (formerly known as permanent secretaries) were expected to operate in close collaboration with the Minister or Commissioner who under the reform became the Chief Executive and Chief Accounting Officer of the ministry and that together, they should manage the ministry as a team. Similarly, permanent secretaries tenure were no longer permanent as they were expected to retire at the terminal date of the administration that appointed them. In other words they became political appointees with fixed tenure, except an in-coming administration retains them. This practice had long been reversed and permanent secretaries now enjoy tenure of service.

The Ayida Review Panel (1994) reaffirmed the key features of the 1988 Reforms namely: retention of Personnel Management Board in each ministry and devolution of Authority to Incur Expenditure (AIE) to a segment of senior management cadre from Assistant Directors and above. In view of the inflationary trend and a battered value of the currency, the panel made a case for an upward review of salary and other incentives for civil servants. The abuse in application of federal character principle and the issue of corruption was revisited in order to enhance efficiency in the public service.

Nnamani (2009:209) observed that the Obasanjo Service Delivery Initiative (SDI) or reforms were directed at right-sizing the service, introducing new technology; redefining its mission; retraining officers in line with modern administrative procedures and integrating the public service into the larger objective of national growth and stability.

The main features of the reforms are: Monetization Policy; Servicom Charter; Due Process; Pension Reform and National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS). The monetization policy aimed at

promoting efficient and effective performance. It was targeted at identifying and blocking all avenues of resource leakages, waste and corruption in public service. It witnessed implementation delays and chaos in execution, but it sought to achieve its objectives.

The Servicom Charter was a gesture at advancing honest, fair and qualitative services in the Nigerian public life. However, services from the public sector as highlighted under functions are still inadequate and unreliable.

The due process mechanism was designed to institutionalize accountability and transparency through painstaking screening procedures of government contracts and procurements. This mechanism ensured that proper procedures are followed and required conditions are met.

The pension reform gave birth to the 2004 Pension Act which introduced a contributory pension scheme with the goal of ensuring that retirees in the public and private sectors receive retirement benefits as at when due. This created a pool of funds for long term investment and the characteristic delays and anxiety of the past decades seem to be reducing. The National Health Insurance Scheme seeks to guarantee civil and public servants access to effective and comprehensive medi-care, although there are concerns and urgent need for pragmatic action with a view to addressing implementation bottlenecks.

The foregoing represents concrete efforts in the context of a developing environment at ensuring administrative development. Notwithstanding the facts that reforms underscore the need to change operating policies and programmes; the need to improve administrative effectiveness; improvement in performance; qualification, job satisfaction and welfare of personnel; and an

attempt to respond to or anticipate criticisms for non-performance from the immediate environment, Obikeze and Obi (2004:159) observed with finality that "the various reforms of the (public) service have not helped in any significant way in bringing about the desired state". This desired state has been highlighted in the terms of reference of the various commissions that looked into the activities of the public service at various points in time. The lack of proper implementation of policies, reports and recommendations of issues (requiring correction) in Nigerian public affairs makes mincemeat of the essence of successive reform efforts.

The role of the military with its unitary command structure, antithetical to civil democratic norms/practice and organisation with negative effects not only on the Nigerian public bureaucracy but on public administration and governance in Nigeria must be noted. To be sure, one major debit entry on military rule account in Nigeria as documented by scholars (Adebayo, 2000; Okotoni, 2003) and continues to resonate in effect and discussion was the mass purge of the Nigerian Civil Service in which no less than 10,000 public officers were dismissed (Adebayo, 2000:85). This author expatiated that "the reasons given for the exercise were alleged inefficiency, old age, declining productivity and doubtful probity."

Okotoni (2003:22) was more apt and pungent in corroborating the above issues thus: "The autocratic and dictatorial character of the military was clearly revealed here. The procedures for dismissal and termination of appointment as contained in the Federal Public Service of Nigeria, Notes for Guidance of 1972, and the Fourth Chapter of the Federal Republic of Nigeria Civil Service Rules of 1974 were both ignored." He took this point further in his averment that the Buhari/Idiagbon military regime (1983-85) like the Murtala/Obasanjo's "clamped down on the civil service, confusing purge, retirement and retrenchment:...(and) by the end of October

1984, the total number of public employees affected by the purge and retrenchment was estimated between 150,000 and 200, 000" (Okotoni, 2003:23). The net effect of the above was a civil service environment that became uncondusive for productivity, battered morale, tenure insecurity, avoidable loss of valuable skills/expertise, heavy financial outlay required for retirement and pension entitlements, coupled with huge social costs and malaise to the Nigerian society.

Aluko and Adesopo (2004:18-19) building on the works of other scholars documented other issues/problems of the Nigerian bureaucracy to include corruption, unnecessary and unhelpful politicization, favouritism, ethnicity and nepotism. On the politicization of the Nigerian public bureaucracy, Okotoni (2001:225) posited that "several offices in the civil service were at one or the other politicized by the military." The offices of the Permanent Secretary and the Head of Service were cited as examples. The implication of unnecessary politicization is that it "can further aggravate the already strained relationship between the political officers and the bureaucrats" (ibid:225).

There are avalanche of literature dealing with the menace of corruption in the Nigerian Public Service with an overall effect on the society and in the management of public affairs epitomized by decaying infrastructure, declining service quality, inadequate functioning of public education and health systems, and an array of public utility dysfunctions that signal lack of transparency and accountability in the public domain and the fallen status of Nigerian laws. For details, see Ibietan (2013:41-48).

The attempt to create a representative bureaucracy to manage the plural configuration of the Nigerian society witnessed the introduction of the federal character principle which seeks

proportional representation in the government or its agencies and the conduct of its affairs, however, this has met with implementation problems "...and consequently become demoralizing, demotivating and counter-productive. In many instances, it had been a source of acrimony and resentment, thus leading to general paralysis of the bureaucracies" (Aluko & Adesopo, 2004:19).

Other debit entries on military rule account in Nigeria include decision-making process which rested/inherited in the Governor aided by personal friends and social companions, appointments into the civil/public service defied clearly recognized rules and practices governing promotion and appointments and this led to frustration, irritation in the upper echelons of the service which destroyed the spirit of comradeship among senior officials in the public service; counter-productive disciplinary measures; overconcentration of authority in the Military Governors with the net effect of executive highhandedness and impunity (Adebayo, 2000:195-201). A carryover of these seems to pervade the Nigerian public affairs till date. Mention must be made also of draconian and obnoxious labour laws which made labour relations quite combative during the Murtala/Obasanjo up to Abacha regimes. These were extensively discussed in Ibietan (2011:20-30, 40-45).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It is axiomatic from the above discourse that despite the conscious and deliberate efforts made to build the Nigerian public bureaucracy on the Weberian principles, certain environmental and human factors conjoined to stifle optimal performance. This underscores the essence of several public / civil service reforms as highlighted in this paper. The Nigerian bureaucracy can become more efficient through continuous institutional overhaul and thorough attempts/search for efficiency via human capacity development based on the tenets of the Weberian model.

Additionally, in order to overcome some of the recurrent problems and dilemma, this paper recommends the following:

- i. Re-orientation or rebirth in the Nigerian civic life through the instrumentality of a purpose-driven and transformational leadership. In this regard, the political/electoral process that throws up mediocre and unfocused leadership should be jettisoned.
- ii. Sustenance and facilitation of improved management philosophy and techniques like Management By Wandering Around (MBWA); Management By Objectives (MBO); leaders should endeavour to live by credible examples and practice Honest, Open and Transparent (HOT) communication style.
- iii. Periodic review (in line with prevailing economic realities) in remuneration and motivational packages devoid of combative industrial relations process.
- iv. Objective implementation of the principle of federal character by entrenching merit while seeking to achieve proportional geo-political representation.
- v. The process of political/democratic and bureaucratic decentralization (devolution and deconcentration) should be done with much consideration for national wealth and resource availability.
- vi. The anti-graft war should be pursued with vigour and without selection. This has the potency of exposing corrupt public office holders, and ensuring that justice is not only done, but seen to be upheld, thus serving as deterrent to potential offenders. This can assist in redressing the prevalence of corruption in the public service as identified by some civil service reform panels.

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