



The Public Service And Problem Of Morale In Rivers State

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ABSTRACT

The public service is viewed the world over as the government on the spot for most demands and needs of a society. It is characterized as non-profit making service oriented, though irregular and perhaps unsatisfactory slow, redtapism etc. the civil service forms the major or focal point of the public service in any society and the symbolization is stronger even in terms of bureaucracy. Many schools of thought accuse the civil service of inertia, yet it is known that the civil service is the main force of stability in times of crisis and a powerful force for growth and change in normal time in any country. This study takes a general look at the nature, role and organization of the public service and the civil service in Nigeria and the problems of loyalty, performance and job satisfaction. The study is a descriptive survey, data were gotten from literatures from the Rivers State and service as well as library documentations. The researcher recommends among others that civil servants should avoid logistical attitude to work. This makes workers unable to carry out governments policies faithfully and efficiently because the work is considered as “no man’s work”.

Keywords: Public, Service, problem, morale

INTRODUCTION

It is perhaps necessary to begin this discussion by attempting to give a definition of public service. We would wish to define the public service as the entire machinery of government in any country. It includes or embodies the civil service, the police, the armed forces, all government boards and parastatals including the unified teaching service, the unified local government service, government health institutions and boards, government owned educational institutions, the judiciary and legislature. Public servants are usually appointed, they are career officials whose job it is to enforce standards and laws as well as provide welfare services in diverse and swiftly changing conditions. Government is known to be the largest employer in most societies of the world and more especially in developing nations. It is the fastest growing employer and it is known that public employment expands as existing activities grow and new servant is stereo-typed by a false image of the bureaucrat which perhaps is based on either prejudice or on the knowledge of a relatively small portion of the public sector with whom the public comes in contact daily.

The media have continued to perpetuate this misrepresentation by focusing on this area of the public sector. And in the words of Caiden (1999), the image concentrates on those whose function is to control public actions and to prevent people from doing as they please where the repercussions have harmful community effects.

The Civil Service Within The Machinery Of Government

It will be necessary to define the civil service as the main component of the public service, Anele (1997). The civil service the world over, is understood to mean the executive arm of government. For the purpose of this study it would be necessary to establish a working definition of the term to avoid any misunderstanding of what is being discussed. According to Ubeku (2000), civil service as it exists today is seen as the executive organ of government, through which government dreams, objectives and policies are translated into action and reality.

It is the organization of government ministries and departments which are the basic structure and machinery of government. Infact, Ahmed (2000) suggests that, the civil service exercises control and supervision over all other arms of the public service. For example, the ministry of works supervises the activities of government parastatals like water Board, Rural Electricity Board etc while the ministry of education supervises educational institutions and related bodies. Thus, the arms of the public service reach the government only through the civil service and the ministers or commissioners in-charge of such ministries and departments.

The Civil Service and Problem of Loyalty

The term civil servant, according to Longe (1982), should be understood to apply to and mean any staff in a government ministry or department from the messenger to the permanent secretary. It does not include the ministers or commissioners who are usually referred to as public functionaries. The civil servant is a servant of the state and his first loyalty therefore is to the state since the government is charged by popular choice with the control and administration of affairs of the state. The civil servant's loyalty is to the government of the day and he should appropriately feel a positive and consistent responsibility to prosecute the interests of the government as his employer. This explains why the civil servant swears an oath of allegiance, oath of loyalty or office and oath of secrecy. The allegiance and loyalty is to the state and government.

Uchechi (2001) opines that the civil service as defined earlier is part of the machinery of the executive arm of government and exists to put into effect government policies. The effectiveness of the government therefore, depends on the efficiency of the civil service and its ability to respond in practical terms to its policy decisions. It could be said therefore that the civil service is the custodian of government's reputation. Uchechi further states that if it is unable to carry out government's policies faithfully and efficiently, it may not only frustrate these policies but might seriously undermine government's positions and stability. This perhaps emphasizes the special relationship between the civil servant and the government and also under mines the sensitivity of many governments to the attitude of the civil servants to their administration and their concern to ensure that attitudes and orientations in the services are in complete accord with the philosophy underlying the government policies.

According to Ejiofor (2008), the essential point, however is not acquisition of a party card or lip service to the policies of the government in power but so much as to clear the understanding of the policy of government and the significant role the civil service has to play as the executive arm of government in the development of the state. The understanding is that policy decisions are the responsibilities of ministers or commissioners and the cabinet and the civil servant's essential role is to implement to the best of his ability the decisions handed down to him by his minister or commissioner and the cabinet or council. It must however be stated that the higher civil servant plays a vital role in the decision making process. The most important feature of the civil service could be said to be its non-partisan political character and as long as the relative roles of the minister/commissioner and civil servant are well understand, there is usually a smooth relationship between them. It is supposed to be a permanent service and its members should not normally be expected to take up or to quit office on a change of government.

Dotun (2001) and Ejiofor (2008) in their words suggest that this feature is however being eroded over the years in Nigeria with each change of government especially under military government. The experience in Nigeria is that each time there is a change of government, the civil service undergoes a trauma. The civil servant is supposed to be in a position to serve all governments of whatever complexion with equal loyalty and obtain the confidence of his minister or commissioner irrespective of his political affiliations. This we believe however, can only come about if civil servants, particularly those in the higher ranks exercise special restraint in political matters, and are sensitive to the political climate so that they do not embrace their ministers or commissioners by their actions. At the lower level the definition of the responsibility of the civil servant as one of carrying out the decisions of his minister or commissioner fully describes his role.

According to Lawson (1992), the ordinary clerk, executive officer or Artisan has to carry out instructions and though, it is healthy for him to be able to appreciate the policy behind his instructions, he ordinarily has no part in making that policy. It is his duty to carry out his responsibilities diligently and to the best of his ability. He can make and often does make suggestions for improvements in methods and results which are welcome, but he has no part in the formulation of political or administrative policies. His immediate loyalty is to his superior officer in the service, and this loyalty ultimately leads to the normal chain of command to the minister or commissioner.

Ejiofor (2008) and Lawson (1992) in their words suggest that the civil servant in the more senior posts of responsibility, has an important role in policy formulation. He is usually an officer with long personal experience and expert knowledge and is able to bring that experience and knowledge to bear on policy matters which should greatly assist his minister or commissioner. This is particularly the case with such officers as permanent secretaries, heads of division and their immediate deputies and assistants. They have a normal responsibility of advising their ministers or commissioners over the whole range of their official duties. According to Garret (1980) and Olugbemi (1986) this advice is not only on the formulation of policies, but also on the execution and effect of any proposed policy. They also have the responsibility for interpreting to their staff the precise nature of their ministers' or commissioner's policies. Asiodu (1998) emphasizes the vital and crucial role of the higher civil service in determining the effectiveness of government since it participates fully in the formulation of policy and at the same time is responsible for the execution of agreed policy and feels that this role is even greater under a military rule. The top most civil servants may therefore put forward policy proposals and could loosely be called "policy makers". The need for top ranking civil servants to be sensitive to the political wishes of their political masters has already been emphasized.

At the level of permanent secretary, a realization of this need is the key note to successful management and cordial relationship between the civil service, the cabinet or council and the governed. Usually, the choice between alternative proposals rests with the ministers or commissioners and once the ministers or commissioners have made their final decision, it is the duty of civil servants to implement them in the best possible manner as if the decisions were their own. Most lectures on refresher courses for officers of the service lay great emphasis on these needs. The good civil servant is said to be one who studies his minister's or commissioner's ways and saves him some trouble. He has a special responsibility for preventing his minister or commissioner from making a fool of himself and this he must do in a tactful, quiet and unobtrusive way.

No leader and certainly not any minister or commissioner wants to be seen as being led by the nose by his officials. Awa (2000) records the advice of Sir Charles Arden, a one-time governor of Gold Coast now Ghana, that civil servants should at all times study their ministers' or commissioners' policies and assist them in carrying them out. As Awa put it, Sir Charles would hold civil servants responsible for major errors of procedure committed by their ministers or commissioners and it was their duty to prevent ministers or commissioners from committing avoidable errors. The civil servant in turn however, expects some special responsibility of the government to its civil servants and such expectation would raise or dampen morale depending on what materializes. By the nature of their work, civil servants, are often subject to public criticism in the electronic and print media, parliament and even on political platforms.

While we may concede the fact that the critical examination of the machinery through which the government gets its work done is a healthy and normal feature of a democratic community, the civil servant is, however debarred from replying publicly to public criticisms since he has no voice but that

of his minister or commissioner and so, the minister or commissioner ought to defend his civil servants from criticisms or attacks in respect of acts which they carry out in their official capacities. Unfortunately, the general consensus of those interviewed in this study is that such defence hardly comes and the civil servant is most often left with the criticisms undefended. The civil servants themselves (ie those interviewed) see this as a source of frustration and demotivation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The researcher in course of this study, made the following recommendations:

- (i) Civil servants should avoid the lackadaisical attitude to work. This makes workers unable to carry out government's policies faithfully and efficiently because the work is considered as "no-man's work".
- (ii) Civil service has lost the security of tenure which over the years had remained one of the hallmarks of the conditions of service for civil servants, through a general purge of civil servants who are termed "redundant". It is supposed to be a permanent service and its members should not normally be expected to be retrenched or terminated without cause.
- (iii) Since the purge was unprecedented in the history of the service in Nigeria, the question has remained "how permanent is the civil service job". This has demoralized the civil servants and has since left an element of fear about the security of tenure in the service.
- (iv) The seeming low morale in the civil service is that the service or government is not nurturing the motivation factors necessary for the efficient upkeep of the service. A number of factors are needed to raise the morale of the workers.

CONCLUSION

Subjects interviewed in this study expressed a lot of anxiety on the seeming lack of appreciation on the part of ministers or commissioners and political functionaries of their responsibilities and contributions to government. Thus, very often you hear "it is a thankless job. It does appear from information gathered in this study that the civil servants are gradually and very fastly too beginning to feel that theirs is not only a thankless job but that their efforts are being wasted, for the service is not worth the care. Such statements and feelings can only be taken as an expression of a lowering of morale. This situation seems to be on the upward trend and it seems as it becomes worse with each change and operation of government. The importance of mutual confidence and loyalty between the civil service and the government cannot be over emphasized. The civil service, we believe holds the key to the effectiveness of the government and its ability to manage efficiently the affairs of the state. The morale of the civil servant is, therefore a matter of the greatest importance to the government and all governments should realize this. As long as members of the civil service carry out their duties diligently, loyally, honestly and to the utmost of their capacity, one expects they should be given the full measure of protection by government.

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