Civil Service Performance Dilemma and the Performance Management Imperative in Nigeria: A Study of Delta State

K.B.O. Ejumudo, Ph. D   E. V. EFEBEH

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE, DELTA STATE UNIVERSITY, ABRAKA, NIGERIA

ABSTRACT

This study examines performance management practice in Nigeria, using the Delta sate civil service as a case study. The data used in this study were derived from primary and secondary sources. The primary data were derived from focus group discussions, while the secondary data were obtained from cognate textbooks, journals and government documents. The findings of the study revealed that there exists a poor performance management practice, poor employee performance largely due to the prevailing civil service environment typified by poor work culture and sense of competition and absence of performance management agenda. The study made some useful recommendations including the need for an enduring result-oriented and responsive Delta State civil service environment that is competitive in nature and a holistic and integrated performance management agenda

Keywords: Civil Service, Performance Dilemma, Performance Management

Introduction

Performance management is arguably central to employee performance and organizational efficiency and effectiveness. This assertion is based on the understanding that performance management has the potency of engendering higher levels of performance in organizations through the stimulation and direction of employees along the path of goal accomplishment (Ejumudo, 2011). As a matter of fact, employees are the most critical of all organizational resources and their capacity to function and meet the expected standards is a function of both their inward potentials and the outward environment in which they operate. This nature-nurture perspective of explaining the indicators of employee performance underscores the indispensability of performance management as an integral part of organizational environments.

Despite the arguably important link between performance management, employee performance, and organizational efficiency and effectiveness in both public and private sector organizations, it is worrisome to note that the much-desired employee performance that is a critical input for sustainably increasing organizational productivity is largely absent and consequently a constraining factor to the actualization of organizational goals and objectives.

Akerele (1991) blamed the low productivity level of Nigerian workers on several factors, particularly the failure of employers to provide adequate compensation for hard work, while Markova and Ford (2011) emphasized that the real success of organizations originate from employees willingness to use their creativity, abilities and know-how in the direction of their organizations' growth and development path in response to the favourably stimulating and encouraging performance management practices. This study examines performance management in the Delta State Civil Service.

1.2   Statement of the Problem

In the face of the critical role of a sustained performance management agenda, congenial and competitive work environment and key employee performance targets in the performance of employees in both public and private sector organizations, it is disheartening to note that the Nigerian civil service is faced with a performance malady and dilemma that are largely due to the prevailing civil service environment, poor work culture and near absence of performance management agenda. The resultant general environment created by the above mentioned factors has the potency of constraining the much-desired process of initiating and sustaining a result-oriented management of a team of competent, efficient, goal-driven, proactive and value-adding human resource for enhanced organizational or institutional performance. This study examines the performance dilemma and the performance management imperative in the Delta state civil service.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are to:

i. Examine the relevance of the absence of performance management agenda to performance in the Delta State Civil Service.

ii. To investigate the relevance of the Civil Service environment (work culture and near absence of competition) in Nigeria to performance in the Delta State Civil Service.

iii. To assess the relevance of absence of employee key performance targets to performance in the Delta State Civil Service.

iv.
1.4 Research Questions
i. Is there any relationship between the absence of performance management agenda and performance in the Delta State Civil Service?
ii. Is there any relationship between the relevance of Nigeria's Civil Service environment (work culture and near absence of competition) to performance in the Delta State Civil Service?
iii. Is there any relationship between the absence of employee key performance targets and the performance in the Delta State Civil Service?

1.5 Significance of the Study
The significance of this study is evident in its modest efforts to establish a relationship between the absence of performance management agenda, Nigeria's Civil Service environment (work culture and near absence of competition) and the absence of employee key performance targets and performance in the Delta State Civil Service. The study is equally significant because of its addition to the existing body of knowledge on the constantly emerging issues of performance in the Nigerian civil service.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework
2.1 Performance: A Conceptual Understanding
Performance is a multi-dimensional construct, the measurement of which varies depending on a variety of factors (Bates and Holton (2009). It can be simply understood to mean the record of outcomes achieved. Kane (2010) argued that performance 'is something that a person leaves behind and that exists apart from the purpose. Bernadin (2010) also opined that 'performance is the outcome of work because they provide the strongest linkage to the strategic goals of organizations, customer satisfaction, and economic contribution.' The Oxford English Dictionary defined performance as: 'the accomplishment, execution, carrying out, working out of anything ordered or undertaken'. This refers to outputs/outcomes (accomplishments) and it is about doing the work as well as being about the results achieved. Performance should therefore be regarded as behaviour – the way in which organizations, teams and individuals get their work done.
Campbell (2009) posited that 'performance is behaviour and should be distinguished from the outcomes, because they can be contaminated by system factors.' A more comprehensive view of performance is achieved if it is defined as embracing both behaviour and outcomes. This is well articulated by Brumbach (2010):

> Performance means both behaviours and results. Behaviours emanate from the performer and transform performance from abstraction to action. Not just the instruments for results, behaviours are also outcomes in their own right – the product of mental and physical effort applied to tasks – and can be judged apart from results.

This definition of performance leads to the conclusion that when managing the performance of teams and individuals both inputs (behaviours) and outputs (results) should be taken into consideration. This is the so-called 'mixed model' (Hartle, 2010).

2.2 Performance Management: A Conceptual Explanation
Performance management can be defined as a strategic and integrated approach to delivering sustained success to organizations by improving the performance of the people who work in them and by developing the capabilities of teams and individual contributors (Armstrong and Baron, 2012). Performance management is strategic in the sense that it is concerned with the boarder issues facing the organization if it is to function effectively in its environment and with the general direction in which it intends to go to achieve longer-term goals.

Performance management is a continuous and flexible process that involves managers and those whom they manage acting as partners within a framework that sets out how they can best work together to achieve the required results. It focuses on future performance planning and improvement rather than on retrospective performance appraisal. It provides the basis for regular and frequent dialogues between managers and individuals or teams about performance and development needs. Performance management is a process for measuring outputs in the shape of delivered performance compared with expectations expressed as objectives. In this respect, it focuses on targets, standards and performance measures or indication. But it also concerned with inputs – the knowledge, skills and competencies required to produce the expected results. It is by defining these input requirements and assessing the extent to which the expected levels of performance have been achieved by using skills and competencies effectively that developmental needs are identified.

Performance management is a means of getting better results from the organization, teams and individuals by understanding and managing performance within an agreed framework of planned goals, standards and competence requirements (Armstrong and Baron, 2012). It is also a process for establishing shared

understanding about what is to be achieved, and an approach to managing and developing people in a way that increases the probability that it will be achieved in the short and longer term. It is owned and driven by line management.

Performance management is a continuous process of identifying, measuring and developing performance in organizations by linking each individual's performance and objectives to the organization's overall mission and goals. Performance management is ongoing. It involves a never-ending process of setting goals and objectives, observing performance, and giving and receiving ongoing coaching and feedback. Performance management also requires that managers ensure that employees' activities and outputs are congruent with the organization's goals and, consequently, help the organization gain a competitive business advantage. Performance management therefore creates a direct link between employee performance and organizational goals, and makes the employees' contribution to the organization explicit.

2.3   The Purpose of Performance Management

Performance management serves many purposes in organizations (Andrea, 2014). One of the purposes is motivation for enhanced performance. As a matter of fact, receiving feedback about one's performance increases the motivation for future performance. This will in turn increase employee's self-esteem. Performance management also enables managers gain insights into the performance of their subordinates. Gaining new insights into a person's performance and personality will help the manager build a relationship with that person. Also, managers gain a better understanding of each individual's contribution to the organization.

Essentially too, the job of the person being appraised may be clarified and defined more clearly through performance management (Andrea, 2014). In other words, employees gain a better understanding of the behaviours and results required of their specific position. Employees also gain a better understanding of what it takes to be a successful performer such as which criteria define job success. Through this process, self-insight and development are enhanced. The participants in the system are likely to develop a better understanding of themselves and of the kind of development activities of value to them as they progress through the organization. Participants in the system also gain a better understanding of their strengths and weaknesses, which can help them better define future career paths.

Performance management systems equally provide valid information about performance, which can be used for personnel actions such as merit increases, promotions and transfers, as well as terminations (Andrea, 2014). In general, a performance management system helps ensure that rewards are distributed on a fair and credible basis. In turn, such decisions based on a sound performance management system lead to improved interpersonal relationships and enhanced supervisor–subordinate trust. In this light, the employee understands the link between what he or she does and organizational success and accomplishments. Performance management systems therefore help improve employee acceptance of these wider goals.

Performance management enhances the competence of employees. In addition, there is a solid foundation for developing and improving employees by establishing developmental plans (Armstrong and Baron, 2012). Performance management systems allow for a quicker identification of good and poor performers. Also, they force managers to face up to and address performance problems on a timely basis before the problem is too costly and cannot be remedied. Again, the fact that performance management systems allow managers to communicate to their subordinates their judgments regarding performance and there is greater accountability in how managers discuss performance expectations and provide feedback, it enhances employees' potentials for performance.

Performance management systems can be a useful tool to drive organizational change (Armstrong and Baron, 2012). For example, assume an organization decides to change its culture to give top priority to product quality and customer service, this new organizational direction aligns the organizational culture with the goals and objectives of the organization to make change possible. Employees are provided with training in the necessary skills, and are also rewarded for improved performance so that they have both the knowledge and the motivation to improve product quality and customer service. Thus, performance management could stimulate organizational change and assist the process of sustaining same.

2.6   Performance Management as an Integrating Force

As stated by Hartle (2010) performance management should be integrated into the way the performance of the organization is managed and it should link with others such as employee development and total quality management. Integration is achieved vertically with the business strategy and business plans and goals. Team and individual objectives that support the achievement of corporate goals are agreed. These take the form of interlocking objectives from the corporate level to the functional or business unit level and down to teams and the individual level. Steps need to be taken to ensure that these goals are in alignment. This can be a cascading process so that objectives flow down from the top and at each level team or individual objectives are defined in the light of higher level goals. But it should also be a bottom up process, individuals and team being given the

opportunity to formulate their own goals within the framework provided by the overall purpose of values of the organization. Objectives should be agreed, not set, and this agreement should be reached through the open dialogues that take place between managers and individuals throughout the year. In other words, this needs to be seen as a partnership in which responsibility is shared and mutual expectations are defined.

2.7 Monitoring and Evaluating Performance Management

It is important to monitor the introduction of performance management very carefully but it is equally vital to continue to monitor and evaluate it regularly, especially after its first year of operation. The best method of monitoring and evaluation is to ask those involved – managers, individuals and teams – how it worked. As many as possible should be seen, individually and in groups, to discuss the points set out in the last section of this chapter. It is also desirable to scrutinize a sample of completed forms to check on how well and thoroughly they have been completed. The evaluation can be carried out by members of the project team and/or by the personnel function. An independent consultant or adviser can be used to conduct a special review.

Individual and group discussions can be supplemented by a special survey of reactions of performance management, which could be completed anonymously by all managers and staff. The results should be fed back to all concerned and analyzed to assess the need for any amendments to the process or further training requirements. The ultimate test, of course, is analyzing organizational performance to establish the extent to which improvements can be attributed to performance management. It may be difficult to establish a direct connection but more detailed assessments with managers and staff on the impact of the process may reveal specific areas in which performance has been improved, which could be linked to an overall performance measure.

2.8   Theoretical Framework

This study adopted the holistic performance management theory. This theory according to (Peters and Pierre, 2007) requires a performance management system that is result-oriented, participative and developmental (World Bank, 2011). A part of this process involves developing a training plan that supports the developmental needs of the individual employee. Some governments, such as Korea, are moving toward 360 – degree appraisals that require multiple source of input into an employee's evaluation (PUMA, 2006).

This theory entails developing performance management system which requires that employees and managers jointly prioritize and determine goals and objectives, establishes how employees or teams contribute to the organization's goals, identifies strengths and weakness of an individual's performance and recognizes and rewards high performance. The first step is for top-level executives to articulate an organization's mission and goals. Then, managers and program directors work from this directive to determine strategic and measurable objectives for their unit. From these objectives, managers and employees collaborate to establish team and individual performance objectives.

The theory assumes that by aligning individual and team objectives with organizational goals, employees at all levels will have greater ownership of the organizational goals. The organization benefits because employees should be more results driven. Employees benefit because they feel a greater sense of accomplishment by achieving meaningful objectives and by having the potential to be rewarded based on their performance. It consists of three phases, incorporating collaborative performance planning, ongoing feedback and coaching and performance evaluation throughout the year. Using a performance standards approach, the evaluation is customized to each job title. The evaluation sessions are conducted in concert with organizational goals.

The holistic approach to performance management takes a comprehensive view of the constituents of performance, how these contribute to desired outcomes at the organizational, departmental, team and individual levels, and what needs to be done to improve these outcomes. This performance management theory in its fullest sense is based on the belief that everything that people do at work at any level contributes to achieving the overall purpose of the organization. It is therefore concerned with what people do (their work), how they do it (their behaviour) and what they achieve (their results). It embraces all formal and informal measures adopted by an organization to increase corporate, team and individual effectiveness and continuously to develop knowledge, skill and competence. It is certainly not an isolated system run by the personal department, which functions once a year (the annual appraisal) and is then forgotten.

3.1 Research Methods

This study adopted a qualitative case study method. This research method, according to Yin (2003), has three aspects viz: investigation of a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context, the existence of boundaries between the phenomenon and the real life context and the use of multiple sources of evidence. The qualitative case study method also lends itself to exploratory, descriptive and explanatory methods. This study which examines performance management in the Delta state civil service utilized both primary and secondary sources

of data.

3.2   Primary Data

The primary data utilized in this study were derived from focus group discussion sessions conducted by the researcher. Whether to test ideas for new projects, to uncover attitudes to volunteering or understand the needs of the community, focus groups are a straightforward way for research into topical issues that can benefit from the vast ideas and experiences of experts and significant others from different or related fields of study. Focus groups have proved to be a highly insightful research technique for engaging a group of people with a question, product or idea (Stone, 2013). Focus groups in this study were structured in a manner that the researcher interacted with the participants so as to allow conversations to flow and develop, rather than to encourage expected answers (Charleson, 2012).To guarantee robust and insightful discussion sessions, the mix of individuals that participated was carefully determined by the researcher who facilitated during the discussion sessions (Bolt, 2011).

Three sessions were conducted with three different groups made up of six (6) participants each. There is no optimal number of participants advocated in the literature, but in order to fully involve every participant and avoid uncontrollable discussion sessions, Frich-Lyon, (1981) recommended 8-12 participants, Viassof (1990) recommended 6-12 participants, Oke and Oluwadare (2002) recommended 5-8 participants and Andrew (2010) recommended 6-8 participants. In this study, the researcher used six (6) persons. The three groups were made up of civil servants and political public servants. While the first group comprised of directors in the office of the head of service, the second and the third groups were made up of permanent secretaries in the Delta state civil service.

The three FGD sessions were conducted in three different days during the month of January, 2015. Before the FGD commenced, the researcher discussed fully the issues with the participants to ensure they clearly understood them. The discussion was guided by the selected topic: performance management in the Delta state civil service and it was introduced by the researcher as the facilitator. Different questions relevant to the above topic were asked and the discussions took place in a friendly and productive manner with an observer in each of the three focus group discussion sessions. Also, the focus group discussions were recorded in order to ensure that the data captured can be analyzed later. This can be achieved through detailed note taking, although a preferred option is to record the session, so that a transcript of what was said can be written up later.

3.3   Secondary Data

The secondary data in this study were derived through content analysis instrument. This instrument was utilized in collecting relevant data from texts, journals and government documents in an analytical manner that is fruitful for the study. Content or textual analysis enables a researcher to carry out an in-depth analysis of existing data and to provide explanation for them in a manner that is useful and fruitful as Richard (2012) rightly emphasized.

3.4   Data Analysis

Analysis of the data derived from the focus group discussions was carried out by first revisiting the objectives of this study and looking through the detailed notes taken during the discussion sessions. The analysis was aimed at identifying key themes and points of consensus or disagreement as well as noting useful quotations which reflect the purposes of the research as Woods (2012) rightly articulated. In this study, all the notes taken at the focus group discussion sessions were read and transcribed. The transcribed versions of the focus group sessions were compared with the notes taken during FGD sessions to fill the identified gaps. The consensus in the opinions and the commonality in the ideas expressed and presented during the focus group discussion sessions constituted the basis for answering the research questions raised in this study. This process was supported with the qualitative data generated in the study through in-depth content analysis of cognate text books and journals (Richard, 2012) based on the research theme: performance management in the Delta state civil service.

Data Presentation and Analysis
4.1 Data Presentation

In Nigeria, the civil service is the bedrock of the executive arm of government and, by implication, the nerve-center for the implementation of governmental policies. The Nigerian civil service is therefore responsible for the management of governmental machinery and the execution of the functions and duties that public administration demands. The strategic importance of the Nigerian civil service is evidently not subject to controversy primarily because of the pivotal position that it occupies in the Nigerian society. In fact, the notable importance of the Nigerian civil service may have accounted partly for the numerous commissions that have been set up to deal with the question of public sector performance and the need to make the sector result-oriented.

Available data obtained during the focus group discussion sessions with directors in the office of the head of service of Delta State and permanent secretaries in some of the ministries in the Delta State civil service reveal that the indispensability of the state civil service is not in doubt despite the growing concern about its poor and abysmal performance. This agrees with the contention of Peters and Pierre (2007) that although the failure of the public sector has its own negative consequences for government and society, yet; it is the major point of contact between citizens and the state. The Nigerian civil service has, in fact, come under severe attack for its performance dilemma despite the gargantuan of reforms in the sector (Ejumudo, 2011).

The focus group discussion sessions also indicated that, in the face of the somewhat disappointingly low performance of the Delta State civil service and the poor service delivery record, there exists a near absence of performance management in the service. In addition, there was congruence in the views of the discussants that the poor employee performance in the Delta State civil service is largely due to the prevailing civil service environment, poor work culture and near absence of performance management agenda.

The discussants also agreed that the resultant general environment created by the above mentioned factors has actually affected the much-desired process of initiating and sustaining a result-oriented management of a team of competent, efficient, goal-driven, proactive and value-adding human resource for enhanced civil service performance in Delta State. The focus group discussion participants emphasized that the poor performance environment and work culture in the Delta State civil service manifest in sundry ways including poor response to deadlines on official assignments, inability to skilfully handle official responsibilities, absenteeism, lateness to work and truancy.

4.2 Data Analysis
The central aim and objective of the focus group discussions was to identify the key areas of consensus or disagreement among the discussants. The out- come of the three focus group discussions on different aspects of the central theme "Performance Management in the Delta State Civil Service" shows that there exists a significant relationship between the absence of performance management agenda, Nigeria's Civil Service environment (work culture and near absence of competition), the absence of employee key performance targets and the poor performance of employees in the Delta State Civil Service.

Consequent upon the data presented and analyzed above, the three research questions in this study: is there any relationship between the absence of performance management agenda and performance in the Delta State Civil Service; is there any relationship between the relevance of Nigeria's Civil Service environment (work culture and near absence of competition) to performance in the Delta State Civil Service; and is there any relationship between the absence of employee key performance targets and the performance in the Delta State Civil Service are significantly sustained and accepted.

Summary of Findings, Conclusion and Recommendations
5.1   Summary of Findings
This study came up with some valuable findings. Such findings became possible through the use of selective utilization of focus group discussions and in-depth library and documentary sources of information.

First and foremost, the study revealed the existence of the absence of performance management agenda in the Delta State civil service. The study further showed the nexus between Nigeria's civil service environment (typified by poor work culture and near absence of competition) and the poor employee performance in the Delta State civil service. The study equally indicated that the culture of poor performance that has largely manifested in sundry ways including: poor response to deadlines on official assignments, inability to skilfully handle official responsibilities, absenteeism, lateness to work and truancy is partly a function of the absence of employee key performance targets in the Delta State civil service.

5.2   Conclusion
Performance management is arguably central to employee performance in the Delta State civil service. This assertion is premised on the understanding that performance management has the potency of engendering higher levels of performance in organizations through the stimulation and direction of employees along the path of goal accomplishment. And, in so far as employees are the only resource that can deliberately frustrate the accomplishment of organizational goals, the civil service environment and work culture are expectedly supposed to be at the heart of efficient and effective employee performance. In fact, employees are the most critical of all organizational resources and their capacity to function and meet the expected standards in the Delta State civil service is also a function of the existence of a clear performance management agenda.

5.3   Recommendations
To actualize the facilitating role of performance management in the achievement of an increasingly sustainable level of employee performance in the Delta State civil service, there is a need for the recognition and acceptance

of a genial civil service environment and favourable employee work culture. Also, an enduring result-oriented and responsive Delta State civil service requires a holistic and integrated performance management agenda as a desideratum.

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