

Ethics, Motivation and Performance in Nigeria's Public Service

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Abstract

Performance of Nigerian public service has been a major concern to policy makers and researchers as well. This is because despite all measures put in place to arrest the performance failure, the service, it seems, has defied all approaches towards tackling the problem of inefficiency and capacity collapse. The paper, therefore, looked at how ethics and motivation of public servants can enhance public service performance in the area of service delivery by linking strict adherence to ethics and motivation to performance. It adopted content analysis as a method of data gathering and analysis. It suggested viable options for effective and efficient service-oriented public service.

Keywords: Approaches, Capacity, Delivery, Measures, Policy

1. Introduction

The environmental context of public service determines, to a large extent, the character and the nature of such public service. Therefore, the performance of public service is measured within the socio-political context of the environment in which it operates. Put differently, efficiency or otherwise of public service is a function of its environment. A country's public service is efficient at service delivery, because its environment is efficient and corruption-free. The implication of this is that public service can neither be separated from, nor superior to, the environment in which it finds itself and so its environment continually impacts either positively or negatively on its operations.

To divest the public service of this environmental influence and achieve its major goals, there has to be rule design and other strategies developed to ensure efficiency and effective service delivery. Some of these strategies are ethical principles that guide the official conduct of public servants. Rule design is the enactment of certain ethics within which public servants must work.

Ethics or work ethics is designed, not only to ensure performance, but also to neutralise environmental influence, partisanship, favouritism and other primordial factors that could inhibit the performance of public servants. With this, it is saliently discovered that there is correlation between ethics and performance. In every organisation, performance is easily attainable where work ethics is strictly adhered to. Unethical practices negatively affect the performance.

As a matter of fact, it is not enough to have work ethics in the public service; there are other ways through which performance could be enhanced. One of these is motivation. Motivation, as a process by which behaviour is mobilised and sustained in the interest of meeting individual needs and achieving organisational objectives, is capable of enhancing better performance. Motivation is a tool to measure the difference between what employees have ability of doing and what they actually do if motivated. It has been observed overtime that motivation increases performance, but such must be directed at workers' needs. Therefore, motivation not targeted at the employees' needs will not have effect on performance.

2. The Concepts of Ethics, Motivation and Performance

The three key concepts of the discourse shall be conceptualised and put in appropriate contextual perspective for clarity of intent.

2.1 Ethics

The words “ethics” has Greek origin, traditionally referred to as rules of conduct. Ethics also refers to moral philosophy, that is, discipline of critical analysis of the meaning and justification of moral beliefs.

Ethics is essentially normative, that is, it prescribes human behaviour as obligatory, prohibited, or permissible. There is considerable overlap between ethics and law, and ethics and etiquette. Much of the law embodies ethical principles: respect for basic rights to life, property, and the right of citizens to participate in political life. It is usually unethical to break the law. A breach of etiquette can also be unethical if it is done intentionally to offend someone, simply for one’s own amusement (Perry, 2000). Moral principles state how human beings ought to treat one another; moral claims cannot be proved or disproved by empirical means alone.

Ethics concerns itself with right and wrong; good and bad; duty and obligation and moral and responsibility. Certain behaviour or actions are generally considered as morally wrong and ought not to be done by anybody in the society (Oluya, 1998, 106). Oluya describes such forms of behaviour as: armed robbery, murder, dishonesty, corruption, etc. Equally, he described some behaviour as morally good: honesty, kindness, respect for life, self-discipline, patriotism, etc. The questions that readily come to one’s mind are: why do we consider certain actions as good and others as bad? What do we even mean when we say certain action is bad? Is it appropriate for an individual to consider some actions as bad and some as good judging by himself? Is it true that there is nothing good or bad but thinking makes it so? Or are certain things good or bad irrespective of our thinking? What are the fundamental principles of morality and how do we know them.

These and similar questions are what ethics deals with. What then is Ethics? Ethics, according to (Oluya, 1998) is ‘the science of morality which examines the nature of moral values and judgement of human conduct’. He submits further that ethics is normative science that studies the norms of human behaviour. Generally, ethics is a system of moral principles or rules of behaviour that controls, influences or regulates a person’s behaviour.

Ethics, in essence, does not concern itself with the description of the ways things are but the way things ought to be. It deals with norms or standard of human behaviour. The aim of ethics is not to describe the way people do behave in practice, but state the way people ought to behave. It is the norms of conduct to which human actions ought to conform.

Essentially, the major function of ethics is to regulate the behaviour of public servants to act according to the dictates and guidelines of their profession to achieve efficiency and increase performance.

2.2 Ethical Obligations of Public Officials

- Impartial judgment in the service of all constituents.
- Avoidance of conflicts of interest that could undermine objective judgment.

- Abhorrence of favouritism towards family and friends in appointment.
- Prohibition of bribes in the discharge of official duties.
- Forbidden investment in a company in which one has vested interest.

3. Motivation

The term motivation is derived from the Latin word *mouvere*, meaning to move. In public service, motivation occupies a key position. This is because it is concerned with inducing people to work to the best of their ability, to elicit better performance. Motivation, according to Glueck, refers to ‘the inner state that energises channels and sustains human behaviour’ (Cited in Okojie, 1998). In the same vein, Robbins (1988) conceives motivation as ‘the willingness to exert high level of effort to reach organisational goals conditioned by the efforts and organisational ability to satisfy some individual need within the organisation’. Corroborating this, Okojie, et al (1998) while summarising the various definitions of motivation, conclude that motivation refers to ‘the process of being stimulated or influenced to act in a particular way in order to accomplish goals laid down by the organisation.’

3.1 Performance

Performance is an action that involves a lot of efforts aimed at achieving a purpose. Performance is measured on a given set of standard to determine how well or badly a duty or an activity is carried out. Therefore, performance could be good or poor.

3.2 Public Service

Public service is a body or department in the executive arm of government with the responsibility of assisting in the planning and implementation of government policies. It is not profit-oriented but an institution established to deliver essential services to the people. Public service comprises: ministries, parastatals, agencies, corporations, etc.

4. Factors that can Enhance Performance at Work

1. **Provision of Work Facilities:** Employee must be provided with the facilities he needs to work with at work. This will go a long way in enhancing employee’s performance.
2. **Friendly Work Environment:** Performance is enhanced where there is atmosphere conducive for higher productivity. The friendly environment naturally elicits performance as there is cooperation rather than conflict; harmonious relationship in place of rancour.
3. **Capacity Building:** Capacity building is a mechanism put in place by organisations to increase the way an employee could work. In other words, capacity building involves training, creating opportunities for employees, and other means through which employees could perform better.
4. **Cordial Relationship at Work:** Working as a team, as friends, as brothers increases performance. An employee has best performance when he has a good relationship with his colleagues at work.
5. **Informal Group/Team Building:** There is the need to create informality out of formality. This, in a way, is capable of creating interactions which may not have been possible in an official relationship. This is also referred to as team building. Where all the employees and the employers; subordinates and the boss have time to relate, to discuss out of work environment and to share their grievances and what they think should be done to help enhance their performance at work.
6. **Performance Appraisal:** Awareness of appraisal is capable of making an employee increase his performance, having known that there is time to evaluate his efforts and to reward or punish, depending on the efforts he puts into production process.

7. **Promotion/Assurance of Rewards:** Also promotion is a source of performance enhancement. Promotion or assurance of rewards encourages workers to perform to the best of their ability.
8. **Discipline/Punishment:** As rewards increase performance so also is the awareness of punishment. When an employee knows the gravity of an offence and the likely punishment, he chooses to behave and be a law abiding employee at work.

4.1. Factors Inhibiting Performance

Official Hostility: Hostile relationship among employees or from the boss to the subordinate naturally kills employee's morale and consequently reduces his performance.

Individualism: Individualism is a situation where workers work separately without cooperation. Cooperation at work increases performance. Cooperation brings new initiative, new idea and new suggestions, and builds team, as workers work as a team and not as segmented entity.

Lack of Initiatives/Routinisation: Bureaucratic organisation discourages initiatives. Routinisation is a situation where workers keep doing the same pattern of work over and over. This leads to boredom and reduces performance.

Low Wage: Low wage also leads to low performance as workers are not motivated to put in their best. In some cases, workers engage in menial job that distracts their concentration and focus on their jobs; some even sell at their offices to augment the little salaries they are earning, thus reducing their levels of performance.

Lack of Work Challenges: This is a situation where workers are not encouraged to engage in opportunities that would help them in their work. It can also mean a situation where workers are not given the opportunities to have on-the-job training.

Psychological Factors: If workers are going through psychological trauma, psychological depression and other things that may disturb their minds, there is the likelihood of poor performance. The psychological trauma may be as a result of death of a dear one or a divorce.

Job Fulfilment/Self Actualisation: Workers who do not love the type of job they do find it difficult to be as productive as they may be if on the job they love. So there is problem of self actualisation and job fulfilment. It does not count if the job is lucrative or attracts high salary; what matters is fulfilment and actualisation, without which performance will be very low, as workers have low morale at work.

5. Ethics in the Nigeria's Public Service

The importance of ethics in any organisation could be better appreciated if an organisation is run without it. Lack of ethics or failure to adhere strictly to it is capable of ruining an organisation. Unethical organisation is bound to be run like an extension of private or personal property and so corruption, inefficiency, favouritism, nepotism, kick-backs, mismanagement, mediocrity, etc, abound. While trying to corroborate this standpoint, a group of experts on the United Nations Programme on Public Administration (1997) insists that

character is the focus of study and practice in administrative ethics: the most critical problem is the scarcity of men and women of good character in positions of leadership- whether public, private, educational, religious, etc. For too long, the management orthodoxy has taken as axiomatic the proposition that good systems will produce good people. However, it is clear that a just society depends more on the moral trustworthiness of its citizens and leaders than upon structures and systems. Costly ethical failures of organisational leaders have caused irreparable damage.

Derived from this is the fact that organisations and their members must not be moral only where it is efficient to do so; they must be efficient only where it is moral to do so. Efficiency at any cost is not acceptable, but efficiency with moral and ethical conduct is imperative. Organisational structures reflect value choices and ethical commitments made by those who design organisations.

Therefore, the importance of ethics cannot be over-flogged. Ethics in the Nigeria's public service is the backbone on which performance leans. It is a pivot that ensures stability, continuity, orderliness and development of the state. It is also capable of preventing such habits as arbitrariness, tyranny, self seeking, favouritism, rent seeking, corruption, partiality, partisanship, etc. If there is any corrupt-free, efficient and effective public service; there is a viable and potent work ethics. As a matter of fact, ethics cannot be separated from performance; performance in a way is tied to ethics.

In a situation where there is ethical depravity, there will be poor performance and low level of development. Arowolo's view (2010) is in line with this argument when he observes that 'the lack of or total disregard for ethical standards throughout the agencies of government and business organisations in Nigeria is a serious drawback'. This is because public service is the agency of government saddled with the responsibility of implementing the community will. If delivery of social services is the chief reason why there is public service and development is a function of amount of social services that a state can provide for its citizens, then public service is the tool by which development is attained. Therefore, development is tied to public service. Achieving development in public service is a function of adherence to ethical practices.

To ensure efficient and performance-oriented public service, therefore, certain basic ethical principles must be observed. These include:

1. **Anonymity:** Public servants are to remain anonymous; their names should not be heard in public connection with any government decision or policy. Although senior public servants play vital roles in helping the minister or commissioner of their ministry to reach important decisions, it is the latter that should be praised or blamed for such decisions.
2. **Impartiality:** Public servants are supposed to be impartial in carrying out their duties. They are to relate to people in the course of their official duty equally without any unnecessary attachment or undue preference.
3. **Political Neutrality:** Public servants are to be apolitical in nature; they are to be non-partisan. They are not allowed to take active part in politics. They cannot campaign in political rallies or stand as candidates for election. Any civil servant who wants to contest an election must first resign his appointment as a matter of ethical consideration.
4. **Official Secrecy:** Official secrets must not be leaked by any civil servant; their official duty must not be discussed outside their office at leisure. Although this is controversial as citizens are, under normal circumstances, supposed to be well informed about the activities of government, including the so-called official secrets. Government does not have anything to hide if it is transparent.
5. **Permanence:** There is security of job and this gives workers psychological balance and fulfilment which may, in turn, increase their performance.
6. **Merit:** Appointment in the public service is presumed to be based on merit rather than social or cultural affiliation. Appointment is a function of technical competence, experience and acquired qualification. This is aimed at enhancing efficiency and performance.

Others include: fairness, courage, respect for individual autonomy, patriotism, respect for the constitution, avoidance of conflicts of interests, integrity, eschew bribery, good conduct, etc.

Going by these ethical principles, it is clear that Nigerian public service has not been observing the rules guiding its operations. Are public servants acting in conformity to these ethical principles? The civil service rules and regulations and even the Nigerian constitution provide clear stipulations for punishment of offenders. How often are such instruments used? The basic problem of ethics in Nigerian public service is the issue of punishment and reward. These twin opposing concepts are always misapplied in the public service. Punishment is selective so also reward, and there is usually no reward for excellence. Reward is given, too often, to the person that does not merit it. This kills enthusiasm and morale and consequently reduces performance. Other problems and manifestation of unethical practices are: undue political influence, cultural factors, lack of planning, lack of political will, corruption, etc.

6. Motivation and Performance: The Interface

The discourse on motivation and performance is like the chicken and egg discourse because of their complementary nature. Performance enhancement depends largely on a well-guided motivation directed at the employee's needs. Motivation is, therefore, indispensable for good performance.

It has been proved that an unsatisfied need can cause frustration, conflict and stress. Consequently, motivation in a way is a mechanism through which frustration, conflict and stress are managed and minimised. Motivation becomes motivation when it is able to induce workers to perform to the best of their ability. When workers are not genuinely motivated, that is, when motivation does not touch the immediate needs of workers, their ability to perform to the best of their ability is threatened. As a consequence, good performance and efficiency become elusive while poor performance and low productivity is encouraged.

From the foregoing, it is evident that the two concepts are inseparable. They both work hand-in-hand; they are interconnected; one is designed to strengthen the other. Motivation is not an end in itself; it is a means to an end. That is, it is aimed at good performance. It ensures better performance when rightly targeted. Motivation is also a corrective tool against deficient performance. Therefore, it is a double-edged sword used to enhance performance and to prevent conflict and stress arising from neglect and frustration.

7. Conclusion

This paper looked at the correlation among ethics, motivation and performance in the public service. It focused on the effects of well-designed ethics on public service and concluded that where standard ethics is practised, better performance is assured and where unethical behaviour prevails, performance is negatively affected. It is, therefore, desirable to adhere strictly to standard ethics and direct motivation to meet employees' needs in order to enhance better performance, efficiency and high productivity in public service, thereby facilitating overall service delivery and national development.

Bureaucratic corruption needs to be curbed in order to have more funds for motivation of public employees and provision of services for the people. Merit should be promoted and indolence and indiscipline should be seriously discouraged. Mechanism should be put in place to punish public servants that are found to have been corrupt or have aided corrupt tendencies.

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