Towards a Better Public Service Management in Nigeria: The 'Target-Setting' Technique to the Rescue

C. C. Ikeji

Institute of Public Policy & Administration, University of Calabar

Abstract

In the face of decidedly poor public service delivery in Nigeria over time, series of public sector reforms had been undertaken with varying outcomes. In form, scope and dimension, these reforms had been characteristically different. An important innovation introduced in one of the major nation-wide reforms is the 'Target-Setting Technique'. As a management tool, the technique was deigned to improve service-delivery in the public sector in Nigeria. This paper is an effort to assess how far this administrative innovation has succeeded in achieving its goal. Using the descriptive analytical approach, the paper examine the face s and application of the technique. The conclusion drawn is that the coming of the mechanism had changed little or nothing as far service-delivery in the public sector in Nigeria is concerned.

Introduction

As the title suggests, this chapter seeks to examine the system of 'Target Setting', otherwise referred to as goal-setting, and work attitude and their relationship to productivity in the Local Government System in Nigeria Our point of departure is the recognition, firstly, of the current impression amongst Nigerians that our public services are characterized by relatively unimpressive level of productivity; and second, the need to effect necessary corrections in this regard. Our focal point is the administrative structure and processes in the Local Government System in Nigeria.

'Target Setting' as a Policy Objective

With the clear intent to enhance and ensure a more result-oriented Local Government System in Nigeria, the Federal Military Government in a policy document provided, under Sec. 11.10, that:

> In consultation with the Secretary to Local Government and Supervisory Councillors, a Local Government shall set the target which each employee in the Local Government shall aim at, even in routine matters (Impl. Guidelines).

For sake of clarity and emphasis, the document further provides, in part, under Sec. 11.11, that:

> In setting targets, it shall be noted that the targets are
> different from functions or job-description. Targets shall be set in terms of time, cost, quantity and/or quality" (Ibid).

It is remarkable that the quest for higher productivity, as evidenced from the above policy position of the Federal Government, has come to be the hall-mark of the relatively recent Civil Service Reforms in the Local Government Service. In pursuit of this goal of higher productivity, target-setting became the chosen means. 'Target Setting' as a Management Technique Basically, target setting is a form of planning process on the basis of advance projection of tasks to be accomplished within a specified period of time and, often times, by whom and how it is to be accomplished. It is underpinned by the fact that, group effort is to be effective, people should know what they are expected to accomplish; and this is essentially the function of planning. Drawing from the decision-making school of thought, planning is fundamentally choosing between alternatives (Goetz, B.E., 1949:2); or put differently, deciding in advance what to do, how to do it, when to do it and who is to do it; thus, planning bridges the gap from where we are to where we want to go (Koontz, et al, 1980:156). Target setting, therefore, conceptually is no, more than a management technique employed to enhance greater productivity in organizations.

As a necessary follow-up, we are invariably concerned with the question of HOW of target setting; in other words by what method can it be realized? Both in terms of short-range and long-range perspectives, the method or technique of Management-by-Objective (MBO) appears to offer the most scientific and readily verifiable path in target setting. Tins management technique is premised on the fact, according to Koontz, et al, (1980:194) that "if objectives are to be actionable, they must be clear and verifiable to those who pursue them" and one may add, to those for whom they are pursued, especially in a political context. MBO approach emphasizes the need for goals to-be clearly set and defined, what actions that contribute to the attainment of these goals and when they can be deemed as completed. In the words of Peter Drucker, "objectives are needed in every area where performance and results directly and vitally affect the survival and prosperity of the business" and "the performance that is expected of the manager (and lower staff) must be derived from the performance goals of the business, his results must be measured by the contribution they make to the success of the enterprise". This is what the Federal Government sought when it provided under

Sec. 11.9 of the Implementation Guidelines that: "rewards and sanctions will be based on concrete measurable performance:.".

Managing by Objectives (MBO), we must recognise, is multidimensional. For the purposes of this discussion, we shall confine ourselves to the two commonly known and used types, namely:

a)   Setting of objectives at the top, and
b)   Setting of subordinates' objectives.

Given appropriate projection and planning premises, the former, which is mere holistic in nature, is concerned principally with the setting of most important corporate goals to be achieved in a given period ahead; the latter, on the other hand, involves the setting of goals to be accomplished, in what time period and with what resources and means by the superiors at departmental levels for their charges. For effective delivery of objectives, a good superior may find it necessary to ask subordinates questions such as: what can you do?; in what ways can we improve your capacity to deliver?; what are the obstacles on your way to higher productivity? etc. By playing the patient and understanding counsellors, superiors can achieve amazing results through MBO. This is where the motivation approach to MBO comes in.

This approach underlines the instrumental role of MBO as a means of integrating and synchronising individual needs and organisational expectations and demands. When properly applied, the approach possesses high potential of encouraging better and more desirable work attitude, a phenomenon that is generally unimpressive in the Nigerian public service arena.

Work attitude in Nigerian public service

Work attitude, in simplistic terms, refers to the manner of feeling and behaviour of people towards work; such feeling and behaviour being a function of judgement or opinion which in turn reflects the values of the actor. If we view values as beliefs that mould our assessment of relative worth or importance of issues on the basis of our affective commitment, then it is fairly safe to argue that the undesirable problem of poor attitude to work is traceable to faulty social value system which places premium on material or monetary- gains over and above other considerations no matter how noble. Little wonder why we have, at best, a system of barren work ethics.

Chinua Achebe, in his work, No Longer at Ease, paints a graphic picture of this canker in the scene when the President of Umuofia Progressive Union in Lagos scolded Joshua Udo, the messenger, for losing his job and was accordingly queried as to what he thought he came to Lagos for money, other than work. The president was lectured in a manner he never had when another impatient member retorted that he came to Lagos for money, not work. If it was for sake of work, the president was tutored, there was plenty of it in his village. As he put it, "anyone who likes work can return home, take up his matchet and go into the bad bush between Umuofia and Mbaino. It will keep him occupied to his last days. The meeting agreed that it was money not work that brought them to Lagos'". There is clearly no better picture of Nigerian reality in respect of work attitude, especially in the public sector than the above.

In this vain, Tai Solarin had years back lamented that: "never in the history of this country has indolence, total disregard of discipline and honesty been as rampant as they are today" (Tribune 29/3/92). He was not the lone voice. Ex-President Shehu Shagari had earlier on bemoaned this problem when he said, inter-alia, that "the attitude of Nigerians to work is one of the worst in the world". If only every Nigerian were prepared to do an honest day's work for an honest day's pay, Nigeria would achieve "wonders" (Convocation Speech at UNN 7/3/82). There is no gainsaying that no people or nation who shun hard work ever registers impressive development. Our concern here, is to understand how better 'work attitude' among public servants could be achieved and, consequently, by application, make the chosen strategy of 'Target Setting" meaningful thus enhancing net productivity in the local government system.

Productivity as a Function of 'Target-Setting' Technique and Good Work-Attitude

Generally speaking, three major factors, in varying degrees, affect productivity, namely:

i)   ecology i.e. environmental factors,
ii)   organisational and technical e.g. decision-making, planning, strategies, etc., and
iii)   human e.g. skill, composition (sex, age, etc) of labour, general attitude to work i.e. work ethics.

Mention had earlier been made of the instrumental function of MBO in integrating individual needs and organisational demands. Beyond the level of theory, what this means is MOTIVATION. How can you get the worker to believe in doing what you want him do? Why do workers behave he way they do? Is 'target-setting' meaningful if the workers do not put in their best (not committed to the goals)?

Theoretically, it is agreed that MOTIVATION BEHAVIOUR results in PERFORMANCE (productivity). It follows that if one is positively motivated, the resultant behaviour is positive and consequently positive performance. Undoubtedly, motivation needs are constantly in a state of flux, depending on situation. But what are these ever changing situations? In practical terms, the workers will want; among others, to be well paid; assigned appropriate jobs in terms of content; enriched jobs that offer them healthy challenges; healthy work environment; be fairly treated; be part of decision-making (no matter how informal); allowed more control over

their job and life, and recognised as contributing to the objectives of the organisation. MBO helps, in more ways than one, to satisfy these needs; because, apart from clarifying and communicating organisational goals, it is also based on the philosophy that stresses self-control and participation. The big question is can we successfully apply this technique of management to local government system in Nigeria?

Undoubtedly, there are some difficulties in employing this technique in local government, as well as other government systems as

experience has shown. Without question, the task of setting verifiable objectives is extremely difficult. But this does not vitiate the potency of the technique in large measure, and as such, its utility to the local government system in Nigeria. Good blending of 'Target-Setting' pursued along the scientific lines of MBO and good 'work attitude' whlcK is a function of positive motivation, will no doubt pave way for greater commitment and productivity in the local government system in Nigeria.

Summary and Conclusion

This paper examined the critical question of public service productivity with reference to the local government system in Nigeria and the 'Target Setting' technique as a means of achieving greater productivity. In recognising the positive character of this administrative innovation, we have stressed the inadequacy of this technique when pursued in isolation and disregard for the even more critical psychological human element expressed as 'work-attitude'. In other words, it is argued that productivity in the local government system in Nigeria can scarcely be enhanced by 'Target-Setting' as envisaged in the new administrative reforms, no matter its appeal, except when complemented by positive 'work-attitude' which is considered largely a product of positive motivation.

If these variables, TARGET-SETTING and WORK-ATTITUDE, are thus inextricably tied in the quest for greater productivity, the question of how to simultaneously give them expression administratively arises. Our answer lies in the application of Management-by-Objective (MBO) technique, which accommodates both target-setting and motivation techniques in administration. The obvious policy implication of this approach to successful local government administration lies in the fact that public administrators or managers and policy makers need to go beyond creating fanciful administrative arrangements that hold little prospects for success when pursued mechanically. They should address, in its essentials, the more fundamental attitudinal problem among the poorly motivated work force. We can not do less, if meaningful personnel development management and application for greater productivity in the local government system is our goal.

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