

The Environment and Human Resource Management in Nigerian Public Service

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A b s t r a c t

The thrust of this paper intended towards examining the impact of human resource in the management of public organizations. In addition, the paper intends to ex-rays some of the environmental factors that influence the effective and efficient performance of human resource management in the realization of the objectives of the public organizations. The researcher adopted the secondary source of data in gathering relevant information for this piece of work. It is expedient therefore, that since human resource is ranked higher than other resource in an organization, we henceforth, recommend among others that for an effective and efficient environmental control of human resource management in Nigeria, managers of public organization should enduring to fully understand and acquaint themselves to the peculiarities of the environment. Moreover, the managers should develop also stable relationships with various actors in the environment. These recommendations would go a long way in ensuring the attainment of the organizational goals in a given environment.

Keywords: *Environment, Human resource management, Public service*

Background to the Study

Public organizations exist to accomplish a set of goal. Since organization is set up to accomplish a certain objective, the place of human element cannot be under estimated in given environment. This is because it is the human resource that coordinates other factors such as materials and money towards the accomplishment of the goals of any organization. Therefore, the environment where organization exists influences the life of an organization, either positively or negatively. For this reasons, Onah 2003:21 “asserts that the environment in which human resource management takes place is very much in a state of flux.” An organization s therefore are surrounded with a number of factors that plays down on the attainment of its goal s and objectives, however depending on the circumstances surround such collective with a relatively identifiable boundary, normative or ranks of authority, communication system, and membership coordinating systems (Hall 1977:22). This collectively exists on a relatively continuous basis in an environment and engages in activities that are usually related to a goal. Formal organizations and indeed other bureaucracies are conditioned by their environments, and the conditioning is naturally mutual (Onah, 2003:21). As Heady (1979:64), correctly says, bureaucracies institutions, as well as other political and administrative institutions, can be better understood if the surrounding conditions influences, and forces that shape and modify them are identified and ranked to the extent possible in order of relative importance and if the reciprocal impact of these institutions on their environment is also explored. It is under this premise that we shall attempt to discuss some factors in an environment, which influence human resource management in an organization, as well as it concomitant effect in the realization of organizational objectives.

Clarification of Concepts

It is necessary to state that there are many definitions given by different scholars at different points in time, given the concept of environment, human resource as well as management. For example, in his work, Riggs (1964) sees administrative environment in the prismatic model of the administrative system, which deals with a range of social phenomena and behavior which influence the political and administrative aspects of life in developing countries. According to Gaus (1947) identify the primary ecological factors which impinged on American public administration which ranged from people, places, physical, technology, social, to wishes, ideas and personality. To Onah (2003:22) the ecological approach in public administration focuses its attention on the dynamic relationship between a public administration system and its total environment, physical, cultural, historical, economic and political. These variables to a large extent, singly collectively determine the content, direction and consequence of policies and policy implementation in public organizations. The human resource management indeed is faced with challenging environment in their relationship with other factors of resources in public organizations.

As we rightly noted earlier, human resources, is recognized as the most important of the resources required for the production of goods and services. Human resource services are the key to rapid socio-economic development and efficient service delivery. According to Barney (1995:50), “human resources include all the experience, skills, judgment, abilities, knowledge, contacts, risk-taking and wisdom of individuals and well-motivated work force operating within a source human resource management programme, development is not possible. Onah (2003:5) “a manager or an employee, whether in the private or public sector, who

underrates the critical role and underplays the importance of people in goal achievement, can neither be effective nor efficient. Frank (1974) sees "human resource management as a series of activities in which the job, the individual and the organization all interact as each develops and changes." He further identified two major activities within the human resource area. The first is concerned with the recruitment, selection, placement, compensation, and appraisal of the human resource. This group of functions is usually referred to as personnel or human resource utilization. The other groups of functions are those directed at working with the existing human resources in order to improve their efficiency and effectiveness. The activities are designed to enable the existing members of the organization to assume new roles and functions. These activities are concerned with human resource development.

Mathis and Jackson (1977) see human resource management as the design of formal system in an organization to ensure the effective and efficient use of human talent to accomplish organizational goals. Human resource is therefore, the collective activities of people gainfully employed in an organization to pursue a set objective for efficient and effective realization of the organizational goals. In view of the preceding assertions, the need for human resource development for an effective and efficient performance of role in public organization becomes very imperative and important if only the goals of the organization are to be achieved. These can only be done through effective management.

Looking at the concept, management; it is important to state that management to stress that management involves the pursuit of goal of an organization. According to Nwachukwu, (1988:4), management is defined as "getting things done through others." He further stated that management is seen as the coordination of all the resources of an organization through the process of planning, organizing, directing, and controlling in order to attain organizational objectives. Fredrick and Taylor (1903:10), defined management as knowing exactly what you want to (people) to do, and then seeing that they do it in the best and cheapest way." Management from the above definitions is seen as one of the most complex activities of the (people) human resource in an organization. This is because; management is responsible for combining and coordinating these various resources to achieve the organization's goals. Onah (2003:1), describes how managers combine resources to achieve organizational goals. Thus, they do so by carrying out four basic managerial functions or activities: planning and decision-making, organizing, leading and controlling, directed at an organization's goals in an efficient and effective manner (Griffin (1997).

We have discussed extensively about the management to enable us locate the essence and position of human resource management. That is why Nwachukwu. 1998:9 posited that all organizations are purposive. They are established to accomplish an objective. Individuals in an organization work in order to help accomplish these objectives. These individuals wish to accomplish their own goals through the organization. As a result we can now accept the fact that human resource is a cardinal element of management. Hence, as both attempt to actualize the objectives of the organization, the environment where such organization finds itself has a greater influence on the organizational activities negatively or positively.

Role of Human Resource

Human's resource performs a critical role in any organization in any given environment. Suffice to say that no organizations can achieve its goal without human resource. Any organization that undermines the role of human resource is bound to fail, as an attainment of organizational objectives depended solely on the caliber of human resource at its disposal. Human resource exist in an organization to coordinate other resources, such as finance, materials, technology, and other resources for an effective and efficient actualization of the organizational objectives. As a matter of fact, human resources is rated the higher resources than other resources since the management of other resources (e.g. information resources) entirely depends on the former (Onah 2003:6). Therefore, human resource performs the roles in the formal organizations. This includes, strategic role, and operational role which a briefly discussed below:

Strategic Role

It is important to stress here that in the past the human resources were once relegated to second-class status in many organizations, but its importance has grown dramatically in the last two decades. But it is important to note also that nowadays, the importance of Human resource is undoubtedly. This is because of the increased complexity of its roles especially in the large scale organization where the attainment of the organizational goals is depended on the caliber of human resource in the system. If the human resource is managed well, it means that the resultant consequence is high productivity, but if poorly managed, it then results to poor performance. Therefore, strategically, then, human resources must be viewed in the same context as the financial, technological and other resources that are managed in an organizations. We therefore rate human resource higher than other resources, since the management of other resources depended largely on human resource.

Operational Role

According to Mathis and Jackson (1997), cited in Onah (2003:7), sees "operational activities as both tactical and administrative in nature." Graffin (1997) sees this aspect from the legal environment because some have regulated various aspects of employee-employer relations. Human relation according to Onah (2003:7) "is therefore interested in compliance with equal employment opportunity and observation of labour laws; applicants must be oriented to the organization; supervisors must be trained; safety problems must be resolved; and wages and salaries must be administrated." A wide variety of activities typically associated with the day-to-day management of people in organizations as provided by law and regulations must be performed efficiently and appropriately. It is this collection of activities that has often been referred to as the personnel function, and the newer strategic focus of human relation management has not eliminated it (Onah 2003:7).

These days, studies shows that successful companies have always applied some basic human resource ideas, which includes flexibility, customer orientation, a focus on quality and a strong sense of employee commitment to the organization. These idea or strategies might be effective and efficient if used in some organizations, but may differ in others, because of the nature of the environment where the organization exists or find itself.

The Ecological Approach to the Study of Organizations

Citing Heady (1979), Onah 2003:26), correctly says; that Bureaucracies, as well as other political and administrative institutions, can be better understood if the surrounding conditions, influences, and forces that shape and modify them are identified and ranked to the extent possible in order of relative importance and if the reciprocal impact of these institutions on their environment is also explored.

The above perspective is at time referred to as the ecological approach to the study of organizations. Since organization is seen as an organism, it therefore involves a systematic effort to relate public administration to its environment. Gaus (1947) and some sociologists who were concerned with the interdependence of human life and its environment and from botanists and zoologist who were interested in explaining how plants and animals adapt to their environments sought to identify the primary ecological factors which impinged on American Public Administration identified key factors which ranges from people, places, physical, technology, social, to wishes, ideas and personality.

In support of this approach, Riggs in his ecology of public administration (1961) and his Administration in Developing countries (1964) conceptualizes the prismatic model of the administrative system which deals with a range of social phenomena and behaviour which influence the political and administrative aspects of life in developing countries. The ecological approach in public administration focuses its attention on the dynamic relationship between a public administrative system and its total environment: physical, cultural, historical, economic and political. These variables to a large extent, singly or collectively determine the content, direction and consequence of policies and policy implementation in public organization. The activities of Human resource are informed by the sensitivity and intensity of these tasks environmental factors are briefly discussed below.

Political Factors

In a federal set-up like Nigeria, both the central, the state governments possesses a universal jurisdiction over the ministries, parastatals and local governments, has superintending role in the set-up. This far-reaching role is aimed at ensuring that the impact of the political party in power is felt in the states and the local government level. It is important to point out that the federal government encroaches on the powers of state governments through politicization of government bureaucracies. As the federal government coordinates the functions of its agencies, they interfere directly or indirectly with the powers of the state, so also is the situation with the state and the local governments. For example, the state government is guilty of adopting such strategies in their relationship local government councils. They politicize the local government staff by recruiting party loyalists and political associates. The establishment of the Federal Civil Service Commission, Local government service commission of the state and boards of public enterprises are made up of politicians and other individuals deemed to be loyal to the ruling political party. (Onah 2003:24).

Worthy of mention as part of the political factors is the phenomenon of traditional rulers. Although they have not been assigned any role constitutionally, it is generally understood that they play an advisory role. But we know that some of them especially the powerful emirs and obas, influence the activities of any government to a large extent.

Social Factors

Nigeria for instance is heterogeneous society which is made up of over 250 ethnic languages or groups. And for this reasons, both the traditions and cultures varies from one area to another. Sometimes these ethnic differences play a lots of influences in the human resource management in an organization. An attempt to integrate these ethnic differences to reflect the federal characters proved difficult, especially in trying to have a uniform agencies like the judicial institutions. For instance, due to the ethnic background, the judicial system machinery put in place varies from one ethnic group to another. In the North, going by the customs of the people, Sharia laws is highly welcomed while in the East or West the Customary laws is an acceptable norms. These differences in our beliefs have a great influence in the administration of public policies in Nigeria.

Religious Factors

Religion is another relevant social factor in Nigeria today. Religion as we know has effect politics, education, attitude and perception in the society. It has also been associated with violence. For instance, in the year past and the recent times, religious riot has been witnessed in Nigeria. The most recent is the emergence of the Boko Haram an Islamic sect in some parts of the Northern Nigeria. The security threat that this group sect has posed on Nigeria is matter of great concern. According to some revelations, one the objectives of the Boko Haram is that all the Northern states should be declared a sharia state. Which means that there should be no other religion being practices other than Islam. This ugly development has claimed so many lives and properties through incessant bombing in some public offices and churches. For the purpose of this, those areas that have been witnessing bomb blast had also witnessed a great deal of economic, political and social set-back as many public offices are closed to official business due to insecurity in the country. In addition, people are scared to their offices therefore affecting productivity in the public sector organizations.

Population Factors

The Nigeria population is a social factor in the society today. Nigeria has a population of over 140 million people according to the 2006 population figure. For this reason, the government has not been able to cater for the larger populace, hence people are enshrined with high rate of poverty. There is also a case of large scale of unemployment and this has led to youth restiveness in every community and society at large today.

Education Factors

Education is another factor which influences human resource management. In addition to the fact that the literacy level is low, there is noticeable imbalance in educational growth in Nigeria; with the south being significantly more advantaged than the north. Though, unemployment rate is high, technically qualified and employable individuals are few and far between. The result is that organizations spend huge chunks of their budgets on avoidable training programmes. (Onah 2003: 26).

Economic Factors

Nigeria has a mixed and dual economic system in which the ownership of the means of production is shared between the private and public sectors. Nigeria is one of the countries in Africa which are richly endowed with resources, ranging from fertile land, through

countless mineral, to promising human resources. Recalled that in the mid 1970s the problem was what to do with surplus oil revenue. There was therefore, a balance of payments. Regrettably, by late 1970s, the balance of payments problems had assumed crisis proportions, destroying an semblance of a social contract between the rules and ruled. Since then the country started to experiencing a crisis of liquidity and indebtedness. As of October, 1990, Nigeria foreign debt stood at US\$29.43 billion (Onah, 2003:27).

The World Bank loan obtained by Nigeria government to cushion the trend of economic crisis by the Military government and the induced Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) adopted by the Babangida administration essentially worsened the situation. As a result, the quality of life has declined as prices have risen, as infrastructure has crumbled and services have deteriorated. Almost everyone has suffered, mostly affected are the urban slum and the rural peasants. This ugly development led to the massive brain drain, especially the professionals and technical workforce who left for other countries for better life.

In the present time, the removal of the downstream oil subsidy by the federal government has imposed hardship on Nigerians. This development, however, has provoked prices of commodities and other infrastructural equipments, including transport fare to unbearable situation. The organized labour and the civil society rose to the challenge which led to a one week industrial action alongside with street protest in every part of the states. Though, there was rethink by the federal government in reaction to the labour action, and therefore, reduced to pump price from N141.00 to N97.00 per liter. However, this development has influence on the human resource managements, as some finds it difficult to meet up transport challenge especially to their respective offices.

Physical Factors

Like social environment, government agencies and bodies exist in varying physical environment. Nigeria is a very large country occupying a geographical area totaling approximately 923,769 square kilometers. Some government bodies in Delta and Rivers states are in the riverine areas. Other are in topographically difficult areas. A good number of the local government areas are linked to the state capital and other local government areas by earth roads. Few linked to tarred roads, now poorly maintained because of the apparent declining state of the economy. The state of the road, the transport system, the unplanned nature of the cities affects regularly and punctuality to duties. In big cities Like Lagos, Port Harcourt and Abuja, traffic jams constitute problem for worker and consequently affect their effectiveness.

Legal Factors

Laws are made to regulate the various aspects of employee/employer relations. These laws are to facilitate the work of human resource managers in achieving organizational objectives. For example, the equal opportunity Act of 1964 which forbids discrimination in all areas of employment. The laws is to ensure that employment decisions are made on the basis of an individual's qualifications rather than personal biases. It is also frowns at discrimination on the basis of sex, race, colour, religion or national origin in all areas of employment relationship. Compensation and Benefits law address issues such as fair labour standard Act, Equal PAY Act, Employed Retirement Income Act, etc. Others include Labour

relations Act, Occupational safety and Health Act. These Acts mandate the provision of safe working conditions for organizations. The labour laws such as Trade Union Decree No. 13, of 1973, No. 21 of 1974 and Public Officers Special Provisions Act (Decree No. 17 of 1984) are examples of different forms of legal factors that has some challenges in human resource working environment.

But suffice it to mention that rather than facilitating the human resource management activities, it complicate them. A good example of this is the issue of Federal character principle of appointments entrenched in the constitution of Nigeria which is not only controversial but difficult to apply. In addition, most of the laws regulating some aspects of Human resource management are decrees made by the military to deal with specific situations on the ground.

Impact of Environmental Factors

Any organization that exist in any environment is by nature prone to either positive or negative tendencies. What we mean here is that since an environment has its relative peculiarities, it then behooves that its impact may be felt by human resource managers. This is so, hence, many organizations develop special strategies to deal with seeming by intractable problems, example, the use of some consultant to collect revenue for some state and local governments where revenue collection has been otherwise difficult because of worker's attitude or complexity of such exercise. Some local government repairs federal state roads that transverse their areas because the state of such roads directly affects the local government. Ordinarily, it would not be the responsibility of the local government to do so.

Environmental factors also affect human resource management policies and strategies in many ways. Sometimes, because of the peculiarity of the environment, there could be differia applications of wages systems and even staff regulations. A fact in Nigeria is the different salary structure from state and local government workers. The literacy profile of some states can also occasion differing employment policies etc.

The Way Forward

For en effective and efficient environmental control of human resource management in Nigeria, its an important thing if the managers endeavors to fully understand and affirm themselves to the peculiarities of the environments of their areas. In other word, the manager should try to study the economic, social and political background of the environments. Such is the beginning of the control of the environment and that should inform their strategies and human resource management. There is also a need to develop stable relationships with various actors in the environment (federal government officials, state government officials, businessmen and women, chief, politicians etc.), even relationships that may seem to compromise somewhat the organizational ability to determine it own directors.

Since communication is as important as blood to the existence of humanity, considerable time should also be spent on organization communication, the aim being to let everybody in the system discern the peculiarities of the environment and how the peculiarities define the activities of the organization. Individuals should also be motivated to work by providing them

with incentive, good leadership and competitive welfare services. In addition, the worth of individuals should be recognized so that they can exercise their initiative and contribute willingly to the realization of organizational objectives.

Finally, the public relations of the public enterprises should be improved. Their various publics should not be left in doubt on their activities, circumstances and limitations. According to Onah, "if there is sufficient information, human traffic will be reduced and the number of hours spent in attending to the public will be put into more meaningful use (Onah, 2003:31).

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