

Administrative Practice in Nigeria: Implications for National Development

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Abstract: Administration cannot be practiced in isolation of the culture of the society. This assertion implies that the knowledge, attitude, societal norms and orientation which people hold epitomize their administrative philosophy and the way it is practiced. Administration in Nigeria is practiced in ways and manners which will benefit the administrator and in most cases not in the best interest of the common man. Whether in the private sector or in the public sector, the Nigerian administrators would normally use their positions and every other resource at their disposal to amass pecuniary interests for themselves. Hence, for a turn around and development of the economy, there should be a reorientation of the society apparently through proper education and training for the professional administrators as well as general attitudinal change to the way administrative functions are performed; that is, a new administrative philosophy which will inculcate in the society the true and genuine spirit of administration should be institutionalized in the country.

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Introduction

The simple Dictionary definition of the word "administration" is the management of organizational affairs: that is, the day to day administration of an organization. In another sense, administration implies "the part of the government that manages public affairs during the period of office of a president of a country, say, the United States of America or Nigeria. Also administration may be used to mean the period of office of the leader of a country, especially of the president of a country. For instance, during the Babangida Administration in Nigeria. Administration may also be explained in terms of providing, giving or application of something.

For illustration, Judges are responsible for administration of justice while Nurses are responsible for administration of drugs in hospitals after the Doctors' prescription. August Adebayo (1995) defined administration as "the organization and direction of persons in order to accomplish a specified end." From the above introduction of administration. It would be crystal clear that there are two main concepts of administration: One, as a process and two as personale at law; that is, as a legal entity. However, it is self evident that administration must take place in any social setting; be it as small as a family unit or as large as the universe.

Whether you think of the private sector organizations or their counterparts in the public sector, administration is administration. The only difference is

the way it is practiced. This also is dependent upon the culture and norms of the organization in question. Whatever the nature and scope of organizations, administration has to exist as every organization deals with human, material and other resources which have to be harmonized, integrated or unified for the common goal of corporate performance. Even the Almighty Creator himself is a good administrator and that is why there is a place for everything and everything for a place in the universe. Hence, when considered as a process, administration would consist of planning, organizing, commanding, directing, leading, coordinating and controlling functions to be performed in a predestined order towards predetermined goals.

Every organization in the contemporary society whether in Canada, Japan, United States of America or Nigeria, consists of several individuals and groups connected together in a network of policies and programmes, roles, duties or responsibilities in a manner to accomplish the corporate objectives of the organization. In industrial enterprises like the P.Z Nigeria Plc., First Bank of Nigeria Plc., as in the case of the public sector organizations like the Ministry of Labor and Productivity, Ministry of External Affairs, etc., the corporate productivity of the organization is dependent upon the culture of administration. This claim becomes highly imperative because a large number of employees have to be controlled, supervised, monitored, coordinated, etc.

Philosophy of administration

Ordinarily, philosophy stands for the search for knowledge and understanding of the universe and of human life or existence. When applied to the concept of administration, it becomes philosophy of administration. In essence, philosophy of administration implies the search for the body of knowledge including the origin, evolution and practice of administration as well as the study of administrative culture. The origin of administration can be traced to the beginning of the universe when the earth and heaven were created. However, in management literature, the major work on administrative management may be traced to the era of the classical school, and the major contributors then were Henri Fayol, F.W Taylor, Frank and Lillian Giberath, etc. Each of these theorists used different approaches to study administration. For instance, Marx Webber, a sociologist born in Germany in 1864, was the first theorist who was interested in knowing why individuals obey command in organizations.

This led him to the concept of authority which represented the core of his study of administration. He classified administrative authorities into charismatic, traditional and bureaucratic types. The next theorist in the parlance of administration was Henri Fayol (1949), a French man, who was probably the first classical theorist. He came up with his "General Principles of Management" which formed the title of his first book. He provided a list of what he considered the six major activities of an industrial undertaking. These are technical, production, commercial, financial, security and accounting activities. Later he listed his fourteen principles of management.

These include division of labor, authority, discipline, unity of command, unity of direction and subordination of individual interest to general interest. Others are remuneration, centralization, scalar chain, order, equality, stability of tenure of office, span of control and esprit de corps. These principles are relevant to the study of administration today as when they were first propounded. It was his quest for sound knowledge of administration that made him write his "Industrial and General Administration" in 1916 and also led him to establish the Center of Administration in Paris to make sound administrative practice available to the French civil and military agencies.

This evolution continues through the human relations school, neo-human relations school, system approach and contingency approach to the study of administration and management. From this analysis, it can be observed that the ideal administrative culture and philosophy should follow realism, objectivity, rationalism and orderliness. In practice, however, especially in developing countries, administration is at variance with these requirements.

Administration Culture in Nigeria

The administrative culture of a society cannot be fully discussed without a thorough understanding of the culture of the society. Culture implies a complete way of life of people in a society. That is, culture is tantamount to the code of value by which a group or society lives. According to Edward J. Lurie (1979), culture "is a collection of people who had been bounded together to achieve some common ends usually economic and definitive". The economic ends include provision of basic things of life such as food, cloth and shelter. It is crystal clear that every society has its own culture and that this culture serves to dictate their attitudinal dispositions, inclinations, orientations and behavior.

Having said as much, what then are the features or characteristics of the Nigerian culture which have actual or potential influence on the administrative practice of the Nigerians? Since there are many tribes or ethnic groups in Nigeria, the coverage of this Article shall be limited to the three major ethnic groups the country; that is, the Yorubas, Hausas and the Igbos as samples of the "universe". Observing the general way of life of most Nigerians, one would observe that the Nigerian culture is multifarious and multidimensional. However, the following are the specific aspects of the culture which are of paramount significance to this paper:

a. Extravagant Spending; most Nigerians have imbibed the culture of wasteful spending and ostentatious life styles which jeopardize their ability to grab investment opportunities as they come. A Yoruba man, for instance, prefers to spend his last kobo on funeral ceremony of his father, uncle or even in-laws. This can be observed from the weekend rush along Lagos-Ijebu roads, Abeokuta-Lagos expressway and even within most popular Yoruba cities. Such monies being wasted should have been gainfully applied for profitable ventures.

b. Outrageous Taste and Fashion; closely related to the extravagant spending is the love which most Nigerians have for the use of unnecessary and nonsensically valued luxurious materials. It is not only here in Nigeria, but even in the cities abroad like Japan and the United State of America, one would normally find Nigerians in "big cars" highly sophisticated gadgets, etc. Some would even park about 6 to 7 or more cars in front of their houses for reasons best known to them alone! Such excess funds should have been extended to other members of the society or else invested in an economic activity probably in Agriculture, Manufacturing or Service Industry. As a result, one would be directly or indirectly contributing to the foreign exchange and employment opportunities capacity of the country which would normally lead to the much needed economic advancement.

c. Extended Family System; if only one person is affluent in a family, he would be regarded as the bread winner to cater for the whole extended family. This is not done in the advanced countries. Once one has taken care of this direct biological children and wife, he is at liberty to invest his extra billions of dollars on trade and commerce at will. However, this extended family system is being curtailed by the present economic hardship in the country.

d. Low Education; in the language of Alexander Pope, "A little learning is a dangerous thing, so drink deep or taste not the Pierian spring". It was just of recent that many Nigerians started to give their wards sound and befitting education especially in the northern part of the country. It is possible to meet a typical able-bodied Hausa man along the streets of cities like Lagos, Ibadan, Kaduna or Kano selling about a dozen of kolanuts, one or two packets of cigarettes and perhaps some biscuits! As for the eastern part, the Igbos hardly caters for their wards beyond School Certificate level. This people are usually found in small scale businesses in the cities although many of them develop into giant businesses as time goes on. Initially, instead of thinking in terms of some millions of Naira, the business owner would be manipulating some five thousand naira or a little more. Birds of these feathers cannot be expected to be much concerned with the national development. They will rather be interested in their own selfish interests. Although, there have been more efforts in this part of the country towards higher education, the trend is expected to be better.

e. Polygamous Culture; the Holy Quran provides that a Muslim should marry two, three or four wives. If he fears that he cannot do justice among them, he should marry only one. This provision of the Islamic "Constitution" has however been misinterpreted. A man is expected to marry two if he has power for four; three if he can cater for six; and four if only he can maintain eight wives. Nowadays, there are many Muslims having seven, eight or more wives despite the limitation of maximum of four. The contribution of the Christian counterparts is dicephalous. First, the Christians would normally boast of "one man, one wife" in the public. But there are many Christians with "One man, one wife" at home with several concubines outside usually unknown to the wife at home, until when the man dies and a chain of children is dumped for him as his. Shall we call this posthumous children adoption? On the other hand, those that do not deal with concubines would practice what I can call "serial monogamy". Here, one will normally have one wife at home at a time. However, after two or three children and having found another "new blood" and more beautiful one outside, the one at home would be ejected. This process continues until

his death when several children would be dumped for him perhaps half educated including some ruffians. There was even a Pastor and founder of a church who died leaving not less than seven wives. Yet he was a devoted Christians.

f. Power Tussle; the question of power tussle is not less gloomy. Nigerians have witnessed more than enough changes of government during the last forty years of post independence era. There have been many coups and counter coups de tat; many abortive, some successful. Majority of the coup plotters had always claimed protection of public interests as their ultimate aims. Yet "there are several figures behind 6 other than 7". There is no doubt that most coup executed were for the simple reasons of struggling for power; be it economic or political. Successive governments have always been having their own tailor-made development plans. Whenever there is a sudden change of government, such a plan, however, laudable, would have to be shelved or truncated, and hence the journey starts all over again! When then are we going to reach the "Promised land" of economic advancement and self-reliance? Also there is the question of power balance, power distribution or power rationalization among the various ethnic groups in the country which also serves as the killer of our national development.

g. Others; there are styles of administrative management, dressing and so on which we employ in our daily activities especially to boost our egos! Can you imagine an Agricultural Officer visiting a farmyard probably for inspection in suit? A German Engineer would always be found with shorts and shirts together with his tools in his hands. Every Nigerian, if given the chance, would want to be a "Tie-man". It is true that practice makes perfect. However, if one practices wrongly, the result comes out perfectly wrongly. Other facilitators of the backwardness of the nation's economy and which has become the culture of the society include tribalism, nepotism, favoritism and "Crown-the-Prince Complex". Knowledge knowing what to do but wisdom lies in knowing when and how to do it. We have to change our styles as it appears that the sea is becoming more foggy than when we set sail. From this exposition, one can now imagine the impact of the Nigerian culture on the way administration is practiced, For instance, how would you expect a man with many wives, children and extended family members to cater for not to look for money at all cost to satisfy all these interests? Put such a man at the head of affairs of an organization whether private or public, his major objectives would be how to amass wealth for the use of his family. All these are the influences of culture on the way administration is practiced in most developing countries.

Administrative practice in Nigeria

It has become widely acknowledged that there is the universality of administration. The implication of this claim is that administrative duties and responsibilities tend to remain constant irrespective of the location and time where and when they are performed *ceteris paribus*. However, from experience, nothing remains the same except the change itself. Consequently, since culture differs across national boundaries and over time, administrative responsibilities also differ in mode of performance. Hence, administrative practice in Nigeria is dependent on the Nigerian culture while administrative practice in Europe or in Asia is also dependent on the culture of the respective continents. This assertion implies that the practice of administration is a function of cultural pattern of behavior of the administrator; which implies non-homogeneity of administration. Consider the major differences between the performance of administrative duties in developing countries and the system in Europe, what do you think is the main differences which you observe?

It is nothing but cultural differences. Culture, generally would influence, and be influenced by, what we do, how and when we do it, what we wear, what we say, how we develop, our mode of dressing, our thinking faculty and practically every aspect of our life. The way a person is brought up, his family background, his class in the society, etc, would definitely affect the way he thinks, behaves, his orientation and general attitudinal disposition to his work, place of work and the society at large. Consequently, because of the cultural background of the Nigerians as discussed in the previous sections, administrative practice in the country may be said to be at variance from the ideal practice especially when compared to the European model.

For instance, administrative duties and responsibilities in Nigeria are not sufficiently organized, coordinated, controlled, disciplined and sometimes lacks proper planning; reflecting the culture of the society. A typical illustration of the culture of administrative practice in Nigeria is the hypothetical case of a Managing Director called The Africa-man. The Africa-man arrived at the office in the morning about 9.50 a.m. looking tired and depressed. He had decided to go through the report submitted by the Re-engineering Committee the previous day before any other thing that day to enable him to digest the main contents before his formal presentation to the Board of Directors by 10.00 a.m.

The office opened at 8.00 a.m. and now he arrived in the office at 9.50 a.m. with only 10 minutes to glance through the report before the Board meeting. His subordinates who saw him getting out of his car and had been waiting for him for one assistance or the

other described his lateness as one of the benefits of being at the top, and look at him in high esteem. What the subordinates with the erroneous belief got to know later was that The Africa-man had been up busy at home on one thing or the other since 5.00 a.m. He had allowed himself some minutes to have his bath, have his breakfast and dressed up for the office. Just as he was about to leave home for the office, two elderly members of his extended family walked in. The Africa-man had greeted them and to comply with his native custom or culture, he had to invite them to join him for the breakfast while the august visitors declined telling him that they here okay already. Due to the status of the visitors in his family, The Africa-man was unable to advise them to go as it was believed they had come because of the recognition of his own position and roles in the family. He therefore lost his senses of self-control and had done his best to be polite and friendly to them as a man with cultural etiquette. By the time the visitors left, the Africa-man was left with no option than to come late to the office. Already, some of the Board members had started arriving at the venue of the meeting and messages had been pouring into The Africa-man 's office inviting him to bring the report for presentation. Despite this problematic situation, another important personality in the immediate community had come sitting down at the reception waiting for his attention although uninvited. He had based his notion of visit on the basis that that was the best time to "catch" him before he is engrossed with office responsibilities. On noticing the prevailing situations, the visitor had quietly left leaving a note in annoyance that he was not duly recognized, and that he would show him how to show respect to important personalities like him in the society.

Presently, the Africa-man had no more time to glance through the report and to contact some divisional heads to ask for up-to-date information on certain issues pertaining to their operations. He also needed to quickly dictate a minute concerning his comments on an urgent strategic decision. It was then The Africa-man rushed to the venue of the Board meeting as he was a few minute late already. After the meeting the next two hours, he returned to his office panting. His table had become disorganized and covered with heaps of files and papers some of which were labeled "Urgent" and the others "For Immediate Action".

As he was trying to settle down and tidy up his table, his secretary rushed in to tell him that the commissioner had telephoned thrice and left a message inviting him to his office concerning a negotiated contract which needed further consideration before decision is made on its approval. The Africa-man quickly rushed to the commissioner's office

where papers and documents were referred to on several occasions. He was there for about an hour before he returned again to his office. The time had come for another meeting and he had to be there as there was nobody to deputize for him. This was due to the fact that there was a little misunderstanding between him and his second-in-command. His deputy, wanted autonomy on certain issues which The Africa-man was not prepared to grant in order that he would not lose his esteemed recognition as the Alpha and Omega in the company. The meeting went on until the closing time which was also behind the schedule. Meanwhile some of the divisional heads had been waiting to brief. The Africa-man on certain pressing issues in the company.

In the meantime, the august visitor who left in annoyance in the morning came back having been pacified by a colleague who understood better The Africa-man's condition. Some others also were there to see him. Consequently, for over two hours after the close of the office, the officer was still busy. Finally tired, hungry and angry with himself and every other person around, he prepared to go home without forgetting two or three other reports to be studied over the night for action the next day! Although the above case epitomizes a typical case of administrative process, the process is more refined in the Western administrative mechanism. From the case, it is apparently clear that such a process is unorganized, lacks orderliness, unstructured, and control process is very poor; reflecting the administrative culture in Nigeria.

The British administrative culture is orderly, controlled and very structured. A Briton, for instance, would not because of pecuniary interest waste a day holiday; not even a rest period. On the contrary, a Nigerian, apart from preparing to work overtime, is also prepared to work in two or three palaces within 24 hours to earn what is called abnormal profits in order to show off as an important person in the society. What he has forgotten is that whatever he gains in form of pecuniary interest, he has lost in quality of life! In the European administrative practice, division of labor, specialization of labor and the principles propounded by early management and administrative philosophers including Elton Mayo, Henri Fayol, F. W. Taylor, Marx Webber, etc, are respected and practiced to the letter.

Management and administrative practice demands that work should be delegated to subordinates with full responsibility assigned and with absolute confidence in performance. In the British system of administration, so be it; in the developing Nigeria, however, the reverse is usually the case. As a further comparison, the rule of privacy is normally respected in Europe. You cannot pay an European an

unscheduled visit. The game is so played in such of way that even the closest friend has to book an appointment before a visit to an office not to talk of a private home. Again, in the British model, there is nothing like power tussle. Consequently, there is no dignity in arrogating power to oneself. Responsibilities, resources and benefits are shared on the basis of an agreed upon formula. This is due to the fact the British administrative culture allows for the practice of administrative functions of planning organizing, etc, according to intended design.

Impact of organizational politics

Organizational politics has become the permanent culture of every modern organization or society. The impact of organizational politics is being felt significantly. However, in Nigeria undue attention is being paid to organizational politics and other subjective variables giving room for mediocrity against meritocracy. This is affecting the corporate performance of the Nigerian Organizations both in the private sector and in the public sector. Because of the federalism and its concomitant societal systems of federal character; quota and representative mechanism, people who would not normally qualify to be in positions are being put in positions of authority. This has affected and still affecting their administrative performance, and consequently causing backwardness to the economy.

Also affected is the morale and confidence on the part of highly qualified professional administrators and career officers who are relegated to the back on political grounds. Arising from this phenomenon is the fact that hard-work has no more place in the society the concept of hard-work is apparently respondent on the way the authority in question denies it. If a hardworking subordinate is adjudged by his supervisor or manager as being slow, inexperience and lazy worker, then he is taken to be so and consequently he is not qualified for promotion or advancement. On the other hand, if an unqualified employee is favored for promotion by his superior, he enjoyed the fruit of organizational politics which apparently he is very good at playing.

Impact on National Development

National development implies development in all sectors of the economy. It covers development in Gross National Product, development in Agriculture, in Industry, in Culture, in Education, and so on. Consequently, national development comes from all the facets of the economy. By implication, all the sectors, including administrative functions and office holders, must develop for accelerated national development. For meaningful national development to take place, administrations in the private and public organizations must be practiced the way it is done in the western society with little modifications in line

with the situations on ground. For instance, the culture of polygamy, power tussle, extravagance and ostentatious spending have all contributed to the downward trend in the economy. Hence, these should all be discontinued. Again, seasoned and dedicated administrators with required exposure and experience should be encouraged by giving them appropriate recognition and status instead of promoting mediocrity. The ideal use of management principles of authority, delegation, subordination of individual interest to common objectives, etc. should be practiced. However, administration in Nigeria can be cured of the negative culture at several levels using several criteria. The levels include the governmental, social groups like schools, among peers, among friends, and changes originated from within the individual members of the society.

In fact, no decree or constitution can force a Nigerian to behave entirely contrary to his will. For instance, despite the gravity of punishment meted for drug trafficking offences, Nigerians are still prominent in dealings involving cocaine, heroin and similar hard drugs due to absence of commensurate employment. Because of the fact that it is possible to force a horse to a river, it is not possible to force it to drink water from the river. Most of the negative ethos of the Nigerian administrative culture can be made more liberal for meaningful national development through the use of organizational or administrative psychology to appeal to the senses of the participants individually and collectively.

The fact still remains that the country lacks the appropriate ideology with the required substances to tap and utilize the nation's abundant human resources effectively and efficiently. I am convinced that this country has enough manpower machinery but our problem is decisions on the use they are put individually and collectively. In actual fact, what we need at this stage of our national development is an Agricultural analogy in growing or developing administrative talents rather than the industrial one to manufacture them. If we have a correct administrative theory, idea or culture but merely prate about it, pigeonhole it, and do not put it into practice, then that theory, philosophy or culture, however laudable, beautiful or practical, is of no significance.

Summary and conclusion

This paper started with the Introduction of "administration": and was followed by the scope and nature of administration, administrative functions and administrators. In the second section of the article, the philosophy of administration was presented with particular reference to administration in the Nigerian context. Next is a brief discussion of the Nigerian culture especially the aspect that is contrary to the

norm of the Western culture and the ideal practice of administration. Also, administrative practice in Nigeria was explicitly analyzed; discussed and necessary illustrations were made. One would also be able to understand the reason while an officer in Nigeria behaves the way he does. Consequently, administration in Nigeria was compared with the European model at one time or the other in this exposition drawing references particularly from the British mechanism.

The Nigerian administrative culture was said to be unorganized, lacks planning, unstructured and practiced in a disorderly society or environment. This was said to be part of the variables that are contributing to the backwardness of the national development in the country. The contribution of organizational politics was also discussed. Here, politics was said to have eaten deep into the administrative system in Nigeria. Consequently, it was claimed that the only authority that can define handwork is the superior officer which may be based on his own subjective personal judgment of what is normal. In this case, if a hardworking employee is adjudged to be lazy, so be it!

The last point that was presented is the implication of the culture of administrative practice in the country on national development. Conclusively, it has been made clear from this article that the administrative practice in Nigeria is taking place within the boundaries of two extremists. Our wasteful attitudes and behavior should be reconciled with the national objective which is the "promised land" of national development via economic, social, cultural, technological and political emancipation. Also, there should be a proper re-orientation of the administrative culture and philosophy in the country for a turn-around and development of the economy.

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