

ACHIEVING EFFECTIVENESS AND EFFICIENCY IN NIGERIAN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION THROUGH INFORMATION COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT) EDUCATION

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Abstract

Effectiveness and efficiency has for decades been the concern of public administration. The emergence of Information Communication Technology (ICT), thus becomes an opportunity for public administration in its ambition of providing effective and efficient public service delivery. In view of the multiplicity of services that government must deliver to the people, the paper calls on public administration in Nigeria to adapt fully to the use of ICT in performing its functions for greater productivity to be achieved. It advocates among other things compulsory education of students in secondary schools and tertiary institutions on the use of ICT considering the fact that these category of persons are future employees of government.

Introduction

Public administration has enjoyed many centuries of practice. The central idea of public administration is rational action. This is action, not haphazardly taken but carefully and correctly calculated to realize some desired goals. It is only when some desired goals are realized through an administrative action that an administrative system is said to be effective.

As observed by Adebayo (1981), the goals of government are many and varied - the pursuit of the welfare of society, the problem of resource allocation, co-ordination of goals and resources, all pose problems of effectiveness and efficiency such as have no parallel in private administration. In view of the multiple goals of government, Information Communication Technology (ICT) becomes very fundamental as a tool for generating, storing and retrieving information with ease and in a systematic manner at any particular time with the touch of buttons.

Efficiency which is concerned with the maximization of profit, has over the years been attributed only to private sector administration. But the current trend in governmental administration has proved that efficiency is very crucial to the survival of government and in providing optimum service to the people. While effectiveness concerns itself with the achievement of set goals irrespective of the amount of resources expended, efficiency concerns itself with the capacity to produce optimally with a minimum of waste, a minimum of expense and of unnecessary efforts. It is primarily concerned with the high ratio of outputs to inputs. The quest for effectiveness and efficiency as fundamental goals of public administration calls for the use of modern technology if these objectives must be achieved for the overall interest of the citizenry.

As rightly observed by Kiragu (2002), the development and introduction of new information technologies (I.T.s) is pervasively and positively affecting the effectiveness and efficiency of all organizations that strategically exploit these technologies and public administration in Africa is no exception to this global trend.

It is in realization of the importance of information communication technology for effective public service delivery that this paper sets to point out how public administration can make effective use of ICT to enhance effectiveness and efficiency in the implementation of government policies through proper education and training of its employees on the use of this indispensable technological tool.

Conceptual and Theoretical Issues

Public Administration

The concept of public administration is surrounded with ambiguities, or perhaps, short or one paragraph definitions which Waldo in Eghe (2002) described as mental paralysis rather than enlightenment and stimulation. This is because a serious definition of the term as against an epigrammatic definition however, will inevitably contain several abstract words or phrases, which can only be explained by other abstract words and phrases and in the process, the reality and importance of it become fogged and lost.

Dimock in Eghe (2002) defined public administration as the fulfillment or enforcement of public policy as declared by the competent authorities. It deals with the problems and powers, the organization and techniques of management involved in carrying out the law and policies formulated by the policy-making agencies of the government. Public administration is law in action, it is the executive side of government. Public administration is the machinery as well as the integral processes through which the government performs its functions (Nnol, 1986). Public administration is essentially concerned with the management of organizations in pursuit of designed public goals and objectives. The ultimate goal of public administration is how to maximize the rationality or efficiency and social effectiveness of public administrative institutions (Obikeze and Anthony}2004). The use of public administration to refer to both the activities concerned with the management of government business and the study of these activities, according to Adamolekun (2002), means that public administration could be used in two distinct senses either as practice or as knowledge.

While public administration shares many attributes of generic administration, it also exhibits its own distinct characteristics of public character, public interest component and a philosophical content. Public administration does not produce a single product or service. It is a multi-product, multi-service organization (Uchendu, 2001). The immeasurability of public service outputs places public administration above other administration systems. In view of the complex nature of the public administrative system in carrying out the activities and functions of government through established institutions designed to achieve the objective interests and welfare of the public, there is every need to make effective use of modern technology if its goal must be realized.

Information Communication Technology (ICT)

Information Communication Technology (ICT) is concerned with the effective use of equipments and programmes to access, store, convert, retrieve, organize, manipulate and present data. Information technology integrates both computer and communication technologies. It incorporates all kinds of electronic systems that are used for broadcasting, telecommunications and all kinds of computer mediated communications.

Chijioke in Nwosu (2008) defined ICT as the means of acquisition, processing, storage and dissemination of information by combination of computer and telecommunication tools and techniques. At the core of technology is the computer. The computer plays a vital role in information processing, generation, storage and transmission. As pointed out by Nwosu (2008), IT focuses on information and information is the source of knowledge. Information Technology (IT) is mainly concerned with activities carried out in the internet which has proved to be a viable system that deals with high speeds of information flow and has led to the existence of online banking, teleconferencing, online remote, diagnosis of systems, electronic commerce etc. Some of the uses of the internet according to Inyama (2004), include but not limited to electronic mail, facsimile, electronic bulletin board, database and file transfer. In spite of innumerable benefits that could be derived from Information Technology (IT), Nigeria still lags behind especially in adapting IT fully into its public

administration system as well as ensuring that students in schools are properly educated in the use of IT considering that they are future employees of government.

Information Communication Technology (ICT) and Public Administration

The flow of information is central to every management system irrespective of whether it is public or private. It is the basis of effective and efficient management. Because of the criticality of information to an organization, ability to interpret such information correctly is very important. The Nigerian public administrative system can only achieve effectiveness and efficiency in its public service delivery if and only if students, especially those in the secondary and tertiary institutions are properly educated on the use of information communication technology. This point cannot be over-emphasized since they are potential future employees of government.

As rightly stated by Kiragu (2002), information is a product of processing of factual data. This being the case, data which is collected and stored in various forms are the raw materials for producing information. Incorrect or incomplete data gives rise to defective information. Poor processing of data can also give rise to defective information. Ineffective information arising from delays, incompleteness or distortions contributes to poor information. In view of these envisaged problems, it is incumbent upon the Nigerian public administration to develop an enduring system that could generate, store, transmit and process information if it must attain effectiveness and efficiency in public service delivery.

Every public administration system especially in a developing country like Nigeria has for decades been faced with the problem of ghost workers arising from the inability of the system to ascertain the actual number of government employees. This problem could not have arisen if government had responded swiftly to the global trend of making effective use of information communication technology which would have made it possible to know the correct number of staff in the employ of government and as contained in the payroll as well as their identities in the computer systems. Delays in public service delivery which is popularly referred to as "red-tapism" results from non or ineffective use of information communication technology in the Nigerian public administration. In most reported cases, official files are misplaced or hidden sometimes for selfish interests of some employees. This would not have happened if the Nigerian public service has adapted fully to the use of ICT which would have provided an opportunity for information to be stored in the computer systems with networking facilities for security and easy access. With the deepening of the information age, government in many countries are making themselves increasingly electronic. They are using networks as distribution channels to enable citizens access services over the telephone, television, fax machine and computer.

Public Service Productivity and Information Communication Technology (ICT)

In spite of the ups and downs, it cannot be denied the fact that the development and introduction of new information and communication technologies (ICTs) is pervasively and positively affecting the efficiency and effectiveness of the public service in Nigeria. The use of ICT in the conduct of government business has broken down bureaucratic boundaries as well as created unique opportunities for improving the quality of its services to the public. ICT has motivated government employees to put in their best by creating conducive atmosphere where work is performed both with ease and zeal, completely free from the usual administrative stress.

Electronic mail for instance, has been used in the public service as a way of speeding the transmission of text messages within the organization as a substitute for internal messenger systems and perhaps, even for the services offered by the post office. The use of electronic mail has resulted in

a reduction in the number of telephone calls made and in the volume of letters that come through the post office. The argument is that the substitution of text messages for telephone calls should be a major characteristic of electronic mail systems within the Civil Service. Apart from helping to overcome some of the traditional drawbacks of the telephone such as the high percentage of wasted calls, constantly interrupting the receiver of the call, the use of the system to transmit one way information and so on, electronic mail fits nicely into the public service culture. The messages are in text which is the medium with which public servants are most comfortable. Messages can be stored in the system thereby, providing a permanent record and an opportunity of searching stored record by using keywords and so on. There is the possibility that electronic mail system could be used to build up logical files being created by asking for all correspondences relating to a particular subject, say subject 'x' for instance.

Images processing are not intrinsically alien to the culture of the public service. The power of a chart or a graph enhances effective presentation of a case. This would prove more attractive especially if the information technology system creates the image at the touch of a button. Public servants need to become skilled in the use of images in the same way they are using texts if optimum benefits are to be derived from it. This will certainly enhance productivity in the public service. Furthermore, word processing has enormous and positive impact on productivity in the public service. The impact cannot be felt merely by installing word processor in typing pools which seems to be the case at present in the public service especially in developing countries like Nigeria. Putting word processors on the desk of the people who create the texts in the first place, provides an opportunity for non-specialists to have instant access to the original work, thus making mistakes easy to correct. An increasing number of extra facilities are included in word processing software such as spelling checks, thesaurus, syntax checks and so on. These facilities are primarily aimed at the authors who are developers of the original texts. The whole issue here is a shift from people who are trained specifically in the use of machines towards people who are more into administration within the public service.

Private organizations have made effective use of this facility to improve productivity. The public service cannot be an exception, especially considering the enormity of work awaiting it and heavy expectations from the public.

Recommendations

Information Communication Technology (ICT) initiatives in public administration are limited in Nigeria largely because of lack of comprehensive policies on computerization. To effectively exploit ICT for the computerization of Africa's public administration services, the following recommendations are proffered as intervention strategies:

- Programmes must be incorporated in local institutions such as the universities and polytechnics to produce adequately qualified personnel capable of maintaining hardware effectively. This kind of support should be complemented by institutional capacity-building through training and exchange programmes with countries that have taken great strides in ICT application
- Information technology infrastructure should be developed especially for access by rural institutions which need improved information exchange with urban centres.
- Access to African public administration information in the internet should be boosted through creating adequate awareness and reducing the cost of use of internet services.
- Institutions that generate and disseminate information should make effective use of the internet to communicate the information. This will provide enough and useful information in searchable database on the internet which could be used to describe developmental problems and initiate

home grown solutions.

- The government must ensure availability of stable power supply. This is very crucial since ICT facilities cannot operate without electricity.
- ICT education should be made compulsory in schools especially in post primary and tertiary institutions. This will boost the Nigerian public administration since a greater percentage of these students will end up as employees in the government service.

Conclusion

There is a great potential for significant improvement in our lives as a result of information communication technologies, but our ability to benefit from it will depend on the speed with which we can adapt to it. Clearly, one of the main factors in the success of a national adaptation to new technology is the acquisition of the relevant skills by sufficient members of the work force. Whatever policies a government introduces to develop new technology and encourage its transfer, lack of skilled manpower may well act as a serious barrier to achieving success. Educational planners and policy makers in Nigeria recognized the importance of ICT education in producing skilled manpower for the country. This was made evidently clear in the policy as follows: "in recognition of the prominent role of ICT in advancing knowledge and skills necessary for effective functioning in the modern world, there is urgent need to integrate ICT into education in Nigeria" (FRN, 2004).

Public servants are known to display some amount of cynicism in their attitudes to their jobs. Many benefits claimed for IT are equally affected by this similar attitude. Civil servants are not naturally enthusiastic in matters connected with their work. In spite of all these, the public service as an institution that caters for the welfare of the citizenry has no option than to join the global trend if it must succeed in raising productivity and providing effective and efficient services to the people. This it can do by adapting fully to ICT and tapping all the available opportunities that it offers.

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