

## Performance Management and Appraisal in the Nigeria Civil Service: Challenges and Solutions

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**Abstract:** This paper x-rays performance management and appraisal in the Nigeria civil service focusing on the challenges. Right from the colonial period, efforts have been consistently made to establish a viable, efficient and effective civil service in Nigeria. Many regimes in Nigeria have at different times inaugurated reform committee/commissions in the hope of improving service delivery of civil servants. Report of these committees among other things includes improving performance management through appraisal instrument. Despite these efforts, the problems persisted. The broad objective of the paper is to investigate and highlight challenges associated with performance management and appraisal of civil servants with a view to proffering solutions. The paper adopted content analysis and close observation. Findings include lack of uniformity of appraisal instrument etc. The paper recommended development of uniform scheme (except areas of peculiarity) of service for the ministries, departments and agencies, employment of professionals, regular training and ensuring that supervisors have good knowledge of their subordinates.

**Key words:** Performance Management • Appraisal • Civil Service • Challenges • Optimum Performance

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### INTRODUCTION

Nigeria Civil Service evolved through three main stages: Pre-colonial, Colonial and Post-colonial. Each stage was marked with challenges that require major changes in policies and management. From the era of Royal Niger Company (pre-colonial) to 1900 annexation, efforts were concentrated on the establishment of a known civil service. From 1956 to post-independence, steady efforts were directed to structure and reposition it for efficient service delivery. Some of these significant efforts were made through the recommendations of commissions set up by each of the regimes. [1] notes that Gorsuch Commission of 1956 focused on “*Cadres and hierarchical structure, thus generalists and professionals*”.

This is understandable hence civil service is at the epicenter of any successful regime. The recent efforts have been in the form of reform initiatives and practical policies [2]. Issues of reform in the civil service is encompassing, one of which is performance management

and appraisal pattern. [3] notes that the 1956 commission, observed the need for “establishment control” that is examining and advising on proposals for increase of staff, alteration in grading, rate of pay and allowances.

Performance Management and appraisal in Nigeria Civil Service however gained popularity in recent times due to a number of issues among which are many years of distorted administration (military and civilians), observed political meddlesomeness, introduction of federal character principles and quota system [4]. It is remarkably relevant to note that these challenges resulted in the most recorded cases of fusion between politics and administration. The effect is significant and worrisome given the steady decline in service delivery by most public sectors. This development was substantially envisaged as a general problem capable of crippling the expected duties of civil service. Woodrow Wilson in [5] recommended watertight dichotomy between politics and administration. The submission probably arose from the anticipated problem that will likely affect performances of civil service.

Nevertheless, some scholarly postulations, empirical evidences, observation and analysis of Nigeria Civil service does not represent the rosy picture presented by members of the most recent reform initiative in relation to performance management and appraisal pattern. In the opinion of the reform members, application of their submissions would expectedly reposition Nigeria civil service. The extent to which their submission is true calls for investigation, because generally in the place of efficient service delivery, performance management holds firm. The need for improved performance management and modest appraisal pattern is the nucleus of this paper.

The above context forms the background in which this paper is located. It attempts critical study of Nigeria civil service with a view to identifying cogs in the wheel of their performance. It argues and rightly too, that performance management and appraisal pattern of Nigeria Civil Service is beset with issues. Search for possible interface was provided therein. The paper devoted recorded emphasis on performance management in the understanding that appraisal is incomplete without management of the civil service performance.

The article is divided into six sections: First section serves as the introduction, second section attempts conceptual clarifications; the third section discusses theoretical explications and justification. The fourth centers on challenges which are the main crux of this paper. Fifth and sixth sections were dedicated to conclusion and recommendations respectively. Recommendations in the text respond to the issues captured in the topic. In the end, references were provided. It is worthwhile to note that issues raised in this paper are limited to scholarly postulations as well as author's experiences and observations.

**Performances Management and Appraisal:** Performances appraisal is a sub-set of performance management. Both concepts are concerned with service delivery evaluation which involves how civil servants are rated, graded and rewarded in order to ensure that policies and program of government are implemented and that the desired goal is achieved within recorded time. Civil service rating or grading in Nigeria is credited to Gorsuch commission of 1956 which recommended the "establishment control" [6]. The concept was popularized in the mid 1980's [7], [8], [9]. Since then, there has been provoked discuss about the concept, given it different nomenclatures or names such as performance management, performance appraisal or employee appraisal. [10] attempted to distinguish them but ended without watertight distinction.

Performance management is a systematic approach to improving individual and team performance in order to achieve organizational goals... the approach you take depends on your organization; its culture, relationship with employees and types of job they do [11]. It is a strategic and integrated approach to delivering sustainable success of the people who work in them and by developing the capability of teams and individual contributors [12], [13]. [14] in [15] defines performance management as "*a means of getting better result from the organization, teams and individuals by understanding and managing and performance within agreed framework of planned goals, objectives and standards*". [16]; [17] shares similar view noting that performance management is systematic and holistic in nature and it is aimed at eliciting information about the employee.

The definitions share some commonality; first, it is systematic, mechanism and holistic, second it targets employees with the aim of ensuring that their performance is rightly keyed-into the organizational goals and objectives. The identified areas are measured through appraisal form or pattern. [18] in [19] identified eight purposes of performance as

"Provides subordinates with feedback so that they will know where they stand, it develops valid data for pay (Salary and bonus) and promotion decision and a way of communicating these decisions, it helps managers make discharge and retention decisions and provides a means of warning sub-ordinates about unsatisfactory performance, it helps managers counsel and coach sub-ordinates so they will improve their performance and develop their future potential for achievement, it develops continental to an enterprise through discussion with sub-ordinates of career opportunities and career planning, it motivates sub-ordinates through recognition and support, it strengthens superior-sub-ordinates relations and helps managers diagnose individual and enterprise problems".

[20] identified some reasons which include; *to identify individuals current level of job performance, to identify employee strength and weaknesses, enables employees to improve their performances, provide a basis for rewarding employees in relation to their contribution to organizations goals....* Central in the above presentations is that performance management helps the employee through motivation to achieve his need and discover his talent as well as help managers and organizations achieve their goals and aspirations. It is

therefore a vital mechanism that justifies appraisal as balanced control establishments that can satisfactorily reposition the society.

**Civil Service:** Civil service has been variously described and defined by authors. [21] described it as “*officials required for putting into effect government policy*”. [22] defines it as *departments apart from those who hold political appointment*. The Nigeria Civil Service consists of employees in Nigeria government agencies other than the military (<http://Wikipedia>). It is also described as branch of public service other than legislative, judiciary or military concerned with all governmental administrative functions (Free dictionary 2013).

The above definitions share characteristics noting that civil service are persons other than legislatures or military personnel entrusted with implementation of government policies and programs. They are also singled out as progressive careers. This buttresses the horizontal and vertical relevance of civil service in assigning meaning to any regime. It encompasses employees of federal, state and local government owned institutions be it ministries, agencies, councils, research institutions, corporations, commissions or any government-controlled establishment [23].

Nigeria civil servants share same traits such as neutrality, permanency, expertise, anonymity [24], [25]. They perform many functions central of which is policy implementation and formulation/advice, investigation and regulatory, education/continuity [26], [27]. In order to ensure that the functions are creditably performed, they are appraised based on institutional goals and laid down characteristics, rules and regulations.

**Theoretical Explications and Justifications:** The paper is under-pinned in the submissions of [2] administrative theory. His contribution to organizational management was skewed in the six principal functions of an organization which include;

- Technical- production,
- Commercial-buying and selling exchange,
- Financial-search for optimal use of capital,
- Security-protection of property and persons,
- Accounting- including statistics,
- Managerial-planning, organizing, command, coordination, controls [7].

However, he dedicated much emphasis on the managerial function probably as the hub that coordinates the entire function of an organization. This shares

relationship with the management and fundamentally related to challenges faced in the management and appraisal of civil servants. Fayol as well outlined fourteen principles of organizational management to include: division of labor, authority, discipline unity of command, unity of direction, subordination of the individual interest to the general interest, remuneration, centralization, scalar chain (line authority) order, equity, stability of tenure of personnel, initiative and *esprit de corps* [9], [10], [11]. The principles encapsulate the expected function of a civil servant. Application of the principles infers management. Its success will likely result to promotion either generally or with a specific job in mind [17]. The five principal functions captures essence of performance management of civil service of particular relevance to the definition of performance management are third and sixth principles while others justifies essentially the import of ministerial establishment in Nigeria.

Both principal and principles have watertight relationship to the fundamental objectives of ministries and how efficient service delivery can be achieved through performance management. The paper strongly recommends application of the theory for efficient service delivery by civil servants.

**Challenges of Performance Management and Civil Service Appraisal: Racial Structuring** This refers to systematic recruitment of civil servants based on race, ethnic equity rather than skillful performance, ability and efficiency. The development gained credence and popular support following the introduction of federal character principles and quota system in the Nigeria constitution. This affects performance management and appraisal hence the objective is derailed if positions are reserved for selected ethnic nationality. Efforts of the manager or assessor are of no validity hence the assessor is more of a civil-political representative rather than productive civil servant.

**Lack of Uniformity of Appraisal Pattern:** Appraisal pattern is a systematically developed document for assessing an employee’s performance on the assigned duty. [6] identified four common approaches to performance appraisal as;

*“Rank (poor, below average, average, above average, outstanding) a three to five-point scale (another version of ranking); an open-ended method (listing strong and weak points; promotion potential and training needs); and an appraisal interview.*

The document shows the weight of each item in the ranking order and summed over hundred. [14] referred the scale as “unclear standard” noting “good” performance “fair” or “creativity”. Ademolekun and Desler’s identified format cannot adequately represent good assessment instrument that is capable of guaranteeing the desired civil servant. They are more subjective than objective and cannot explain details of each, given some other factors like environment, possible changing condition of the employee, personnel relationship with the assessor, natural changes and so on.

**Lack of Adequate Information:** Some of the assessors or supervisors lack basic information or knowledge about the subordinates or the job. This is commonly caused when the superior is politically recruited. Other factors that can cause lack of information and unfair assessment include; transfer of service, deployment and so on. These factors are more political than ordinary and Woodrow Wilson strongly advocated for watertight separation of politics and administration [18].

**Bias:** There are individual differences which are either occasional/artificial or natural. [6] identified individual differences in terms of characteristics like age, race and sex. He noted that these traits often affect rating quite apart from actual performance. [13] in [14] noted that research carried out reflects that people of 60 years of age are found to be lower on performance capacity and potential for capacity development than younger employee. In a study conducted, it shows that individual’s disposition might influence a rate/assessor. There was a situation where a chief executive had to rate a subordinate much above the established guide due to bias or emotion, yet he was unchallenged. This does not replace reward hence a stipulated guide should be established and known to members else it will be abused. This is the position of most people who may be politically, naturally, temporally or artificially influenced.

**Lopsided Assessment:** Civil service assessment is largely straight-jacked. This refers to where the assessor uses his discretion to judge or rate subordinates. It is not uncommon to note that the ranking might be deceptive or opposite of the actual because of personnel sentiment or “eye-service” of the subordinate.

**Over Staffing:** This refers to where so many people are employed for the same job. It is common where there is no scheme of service developed or is discarded for whatever

reason. Such situation jeopardizes assessment or makes it difficult to rate subordinate. Over staffing results in clash of duty and such affects performance of employees. In response to this, Obasanjo’s Civil Service Renewal programme (1999-2007) observed that Nigeria civil service is plagued with many problems including “how many people do we need to do the civil service job” [5]. This poses the problem of identifying performance ability of civil servants.

**Recruited Unqualified Personnel:** Every ministry has technical department and as such requires professionals in those areas. This is likely what some scholars and pundits call professionalization in civil service. To the extent of its genuineness, not all aspects of civil service are professionals. However, both professionals and generalists require certain basic training, qualification or ability. Where these factors or any one needed is lacking, the job suffers and as a result performance managers have little or nothing to manage. Supervisors are faced with the problem of managing/rating unqualified personnel since such person for whatever reason is employed by a supposed superior officer within or outside the establishment or is politically connected. This is an increasing observable problem especially given the existing saturated labor market by millions of graduates and the snail pace in the growth of the private sector.

**Rating the Man Not the Performance:** This refers to subjective evaluation of the employee based on the rater’s likes and dislikes or whether he gets along with the subordinates or not or whether he likes his tribe, religion or language [7] in [8]. This is closely related to bias rating but concentrates on the social difference other than individual status and characteristics. Rating the man not performance occur when the assessor considers his relationship with the subordinate rather than his performance. Unrelated factors inform his rating rather than the prescribed rules or expectations.

**Junior Appointee Par Excellence:** There are situations where a junior employee might be appointed to coordinate a department or unit. Sometimes, it is sentimental or a matter of routine appointment. This is often against the hierarchical requirement that an assessor or supervisor is usually the superior. Such situations put the assessor in the tight corner hence the assessment is subjective rather than objective. This situation is common in academic institutions and it affects rating.

## CONCLUSION

So far, it has been amply demonstrated that there are myriads of issues with performance management and appraisal in Nigeria civil service. On issues of economic growth, civil service is a dependable institution that can restore people's confidence in governance. This can be achieved through a productive, efficient and effective civil service. This can be realized if they are properly managed. Appraisal stands out as one of the practical mechanisms for rating civil servants in order to ensure that the desired services are rendered to the public.

This paper responded to the raised curiosity that greased the intent of this investigation. It applied the set out methodology to identify and explain issues with performance management and appraisal in the Nigeria civil service. Issues raised here are practical enough that application of the recommendations will hopefully restore Nigeria civil service on the path of efficiency.

**Recommendations:** In order to ensure that performance managers and appraisal mechanism of service produces the desired value, a list of recommendations was made. This originated directly from the litany of issues therein.

- There is the urgent need to delete federal character principle in the Nigeria constitution. This has continued to cause inefficiency by breeding civil political representatives rather than civil servants. Federal character and quota system midwife racial strutting and weakened the fundamentals of performance management.
- Government at different levels should engage specialists or professionals to develop appraisal pattern and code of conduct for general performance management. This will create uniformity and control bias.
- Supervisors and managers should have knowledge of their subordinates before assessment. This means that transfer of service should be made within a preferred period in order to give ample knowledge to the superior.
- Scheme of service is urgently and rightly needed for every government owned ministry or agency. This will significantly reduce personnel bias and sentiment in the appraisal or the general management of civil servants performance. It will also settle issues of over staffing or lop sided assessment.
- In institutions where a junior staff can be appointed such appointment must be based on experience and

also detailed format, rules and regulations for purposes of coordination and corporation from the senior colleagues.

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