The Ecology of Recruitment and Selection of Personnel in the Federal Civil Services of Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The existence of government carries responsibilities of not only maintaining law and order, but also ensuring that life and living is made comfortable for the majority of citizens in a country. In discharging these equalization functions, a number of structures and institutional factors often combine to define and chart a fairly extensive and complex role for government. This is the reason why every government is ever compelled to employ the best materials (personnel) available so that, that symbiotic relationship of social contract between government and the governed is maintained. This paper argues for the fact that the Nigerian government has to grow beyond that level of primordial sentiments in the making and implementation of rational recruitment and selection policies, if she really wants to achieve success in governance and administration. With the Weberian prescriptions of the ideal bureaucracy underlying the foundation for this paper, it is posited that for governments to operate the most efficient administrative organization that would be beneficial to all, her recruitment and selection policies into the civil service should be unfettered. It should also be capable of absorbing the best qualified, technically competent, disciplined and committed personnel that would in turn help government to achieve the goals of governance and administration.

INTRODUCTION

Every organization depends on the effective use of its available resources in order to achieve its objectives. These resources, if they are to be effectively utilized, should be obtained in the right quantity, in the right quality, and at the right time. However, the human resources is considered as the most important, most valuable, most complicated and the least predictable. It is this resources that processes other resources in order that the results of these processes would constitute the goals of the organization.

The personnel employed in an organization according to Vickerstaff (1979) serve as the hub around which other resources revolve. This allows the entire wheel of the organization to turn smoothly in order to perform more effectively, efficiently and economically. This is the reason why the personnel employed in any organization who eventually becomes the bread-winners of his family and an instrument of progress for the society, have to be well structured. The human elements (personnel) have needs, emotions, interest and attachment, his productivity or performance becomes bolstered if he is reasonably taken care of and if his working environment is made conducive. The organization itself and the society at large becomes the ultimate beneficiary in the view of Storey and Sission (1990).

Recruitment for any organization is very important right through the entire lifespan of that organization. In the civil service for example that is governmentally controlled, especially in third world countries, governments should ever be self advised that according to Drucker (1988) that “good organization structure does not by itself guarantee good performance”. There is the reason therefore to match organizations or the public service with very sound and quality staff so that performance would become more effective. Indeed, target setting; performance-measurement and monitoring will be affected without the necessary impetus giving to systematic recruitment and selection mechanisms.

The Nigeria federal civil service comprises the staff used administratively by the central government. The government, whether at the federal, State and Local government level is the highest employer of labour. The government uses the civil service to transform her policy objectives and electoral promises into objective results that would benefit the citizenry. Therefore, the right caliber of personnel must be placed to perform these varied functions. However, the Nigeria civil service is weighed down by the familiar problems of the Nigeria federation. These problems according to Fajemiroku (1974) comprises ethniccity, religious strife, corruption, colonial history, governance/leadership style, the military involvement in politics, the quota system and
federal character principles. It is within this context that the issues discussed in this paper revolves.

**STUDY QUESTIONS**

The idea of the merit system as practiced in advanced Democracies pays greater emphasis on criterion like written tests, interviews, academic ability and self discipline which must operate within an environment that respect rules which govern recruitment, selection and advancement under conditions of political neutrality, equal opportunity and competition on the basis of merit and competence, Stanley (1974). In fact Chandler and Plano (1982) emphasized ‘demonstrated fitness as the key personnel factor’ in the merit system. They went further to state that:

*Recruitment and Selection of the best qualified applicant to fill a vacancy, job, tenure, position clarification, standardization of pay and promotion and pay increases based on performance evaluations are hallmarks of the system.*

Critically considered and in the opinion of Olusanya (1975), the “replacement” syndrome created by the Nigerianisation of the civil service was perpetrated by the indigenous Nigerian leaders and senior bureaucrats long after the departure of the British colonial administrators. This problem took the form of civil service racionization and frequent purges, and the subsequent recruitment to replace those that were purged. This gave rise to the cancer of ethno-regional political competition and political patronage system of selection of personnel into the civil service based on geopolitical considerations. Because the early nationalist politicians were leaders of their respective ethnic and regional political parties, they mounted an ethnocentric and political patronage battle for the control and domination of the centre, including its civil service to suit their primordial gesture.

This practice which has become a fundamental problem in Nigeria’s body polity has taken over or compromised the well-known and time tested rules and concept of merit, efficiency, professionalism, experience, carrier tenure and loyalty that should guide the civil service. In this light, the following questions may not be out of place:

1. Why is recruitment and selection into the Federal civil service skewed in favour of the principles of Federal character, quota system and primordial tendencies?

2. Is professionalism, training and economy used as guiding principles for recruitment and selection into the Federal civil service?

**OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The broad objective of this paper is to evaluate the performance of the Federal civil service against the backdrop of personnel recruitment and selection; especially if it is accepted that it is obligatory on governments to fulfill her electoral promises to the people by providing for the good life. In this respect, creating a relationship between governance, the welfare of the citizens and a respect for the social contract based on equity and fairness. Speci-fically however, the guiding principles behind the recruitment and selection process into the Federal civil service will be examined. Also, solutions would be suggested to overcome identified problems in the system, thereby pro-ffering strategies for performance to become more effective and efficient while embarking on recruitment and selection, and why employees have to prove their mettle in their respective places of work.

**THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY**

In any system of government, the citizens of that state must have a stake in the machinery of governance. For the public service to be seen to be working to satisfy the goals and aspirations of government and the yearnings of the citizens, there must have been established a trust and symbiotism between the government and the people. In this regard, one can argue for the fact that the administrative actions of government should be responsive to the needs and desires of the people. Mier (1979) for instance, argued for the control of bureaucratic power to a situation where there is the existence of ethics to guide administrators so as to make sure that all interested group in a society are represented in the policy process. With this in place, the Federal character syndrome will be eliminated in the system.

In the views of Appleby (1952) administration has a moral quality when it conforms with the process of political freedom, leaves itself open to public modification and respond to publicly felt needs and the pursuit of public interests.
Along this same line of thought, Adamolekun (1986), Akindele (1987) and Amuwo support the existence of people’s bureau-cracy when taken as a way of making Nigeria’s civil bureau-cracy an effective agent of popular and meaningful socio-economic development.

When the above arguments are examined, a framework of analysis is arrived at that encapsulates Max Weber’s ideal type of bureaucracy. For Weber (1947a) the ideal bureaucratic organization was essentially the well-designed machine within which all the component parts work efficiently and without distraction, towards clearly defined goals. The high points of Weber’s arguments are that an ideal bureaucracy is one in which there exist functional specialization, hierarchy, impersonal relationship, standard procedure and rules, authority, legitimacy and competence or fitness, Weber (1947b).

Weber believes that the exercise of authority should not depend on the strength of traditional association or on the charistimatic qualities of an individual (party affiliation or ethnic background in Nigeria), but rest instead upon the general recognition of legitimate right of a particular office within the hierarchy or system to exercise such authority. This right is attributed to an office by virtue of its status and technical competence. To quote Weber (1947c) he said:

The dominant norms are concepts of straightforward duty without regard to personal considerations. Everyone is subject to formal equality of treatment; that is everyone in the same empirical situation. This is the spirit in which the ideal official conducts his office.

The methodology adopted while working on this paper falls into the historical-descriptive model of analogy. In this, oral interview was conducted with stakeholders comprising bureaucrats and with the people. This together with a keen observation of the scenario over a period of three years makes up the primary sources of information.

The secondary source entailed the gathering of literature and documents from several government offices and agencies and existing libraries in Nigeria.

**CLARIFICATION OF TERMS**

(A) Recruitment and Selection: *The terms recruitment and selection are used interchangeably with one another. For this paper, the terms will mean the positive action taken to find the right quality and quantity of personnel into an organization. Recruitment immediately precedes selection by paving the way for producing the smallest number of candidates who appears to be capable of either performing a task or of developing the ability to do within a period of time, duties acceptable to the employing organization. This is according to Tyson and York (1982).*

(B) Personnel: *This constitutes the manpower employed by an organization to carry out a specific and assigned task.*

(C) Civil Service: *A machinery of government used by the executive to assist in policy formulation and implementation directed at achieving happiness and satisfaction for a greater percentage of the population of a country.*

(D) Bureaucracy: *This represents an impersonal abstraction that places authority and legitimacy on an office and not on the person (bureaucrat) occupying such an office. A bureaucrat is guided by rules and formal procedures stipulated by a system or institution and tailored towards the attainment of efficiency and best result.*

(E) Quota System: *This is a device used to check the over-flooding of a particular job or vacant job opportunities by people from a particular ethnic origin. If properly applied, it allows for even representation of people from different background and geographical zones of a country or state.*

(F) Federal Character: *The Nigerian 1999 constitution describes this term in the context of government conduct reflecting the Federal character. This means the promotion of National unity and loyalty whereby a single or few ethnic groups are prevented from hijacking the instruments of government, spoils of office and government employment at the disfavour of other groups.*

**DISCUSSION AND REVIEW**

According to Etzioni (1964) “organizational effectiveness relate to the extent to which an organization attains its goals”. These goals cannot be divorced from the fact that such organization in the opinion of Friedlander (1968), must be
profitable, has to satisfy its staff and can contribute to the development of society. Recruitment and selection in the views of Armstrong (1978) is a "… process of obtaining at minimum cost, the number and quality of staff required to satisfy the manpower needs of organizations". This process must follow the following steps given by Nigro (1992).

1. The preparation of specialists in the various functional areas of personnel administration,
2. The design and implementation of personnel systems and techniques that protect merit principles and support administrative and managerial processes, and
3. The familiarization of line officials with the knowledge and skills that personnel specialist may contribute to the efforts to solve a wide variety of organizational problems.

In the Nigeria Federal civil service, recruitment and selection assumes these formats. The department of establishment under the office of the secretary to the Government of the Federation sends out call circular to each of the ministry, parastatals and departments under the management of the Federal government. This is subject to the fact that there must exist vacancies and the need for filling such vacancies. There must also be adequate funds to pay those that may likely be recruited. Finally, there must be the authority to recruit. Once these conditions are meet and by the provisions of the civil service (Reorganization) Decree, No 43 section 9 (1) d of 1998, which states as follows:

*...each ministry will undertake the appointment, discipline and promotion of its staff under general and uniform guidelines to be provided by the Federal civil service commission.*

For each ministry or department to function in this capacity, it is expected to have its own personnel management Board to be supported by different Committees. However, while the civil service Commission appoints senior per-sonnel on salary grade level 08-10 to reflect the Federal character, the various ministries appoint junior officers on grade level 01-07 under the supervision of the Civil Service Commission Decree 43 (1988).

The Recruitment and Selection Process

The Personnel Department plays a key role in recruitment and selection of employees. This is because, it knows the personnel needs of organizations as suggested by Makinde (1992). The personnel department prepares a concise job description and specification stating clearly the title of the job and responsibility required Fati-regun (1992).

If vacancies has to be filled from outside the organization, an advertisement is made through the print and electronic media. The advertisement carries the job description, specification, age of applicants, qualification, experience, and deadline for submission of applications. At the expiration of the deadline for submission of applications, the personnel officers of the ministry sort out the applications to find out those eligible through screening or shortlisting. Successfully shortlisted applicants are then communicated on the date for interview.

The Nigerian civil service places a lot of premium on the interview method for selection. Decree 43 of 1988 states that “all eligible candidates for appointment shall be interviewed by the appropriate personnel management board or committee. Whatever the case, the principles of merit, that of quota system and federal character are always enforced to determine who to recruit and whom to select. This to a large extent and in the view of Nze (1988) downplays the inevitability of bureaucracies to efficiently and effectively ‘deliver the good’ and as advocated for by Weber. Competence and job specialization cannot thrive where sentiments are brought to play. In any case, successful candidates are notified through letters of appointment duly signed by an officer designated to do so by the ministry concerned or by the civil service commission.

Modalities for Valid Recruitment and Selection Exercise

As a country with over 240 ethnic nationalities and three major tribal tongues (Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo), Nigeria as a Nation has no other choice than to follow the path of justice and fairness when pursuing the course of governance and administration. In this regard, it would be advocated that selection methods adopted by developed societies over time that makes for relative validity and reliability should be adopted.

Importantly, correlation test have been found to be very useful in the measuring of the co-efficient of validity. Thus Pearson product-moment co-efficient correlation is given by the formular:
where \( x \) and \( y \) are two variables representing methods and results in ranked order. If the value for \( r \) is positive, then there is a positive correlation, but if the value is negative, it shows a negative correlation. Since the success of an organization depends on the quality of its human resources, the selection of its human resources becomes a very paramount task that the personnel unit or employment agencies must enforce.

A look at tables 1 and 2 provide another variant for a valid recruitment and selection exercise.

A cursory examination of Table 1 reveals a negative rank correlation between the frequency in the usage of selection methods and the validity of such methods with an exception of graphology method, which show no validity at all. A question which one may ask is what factors are responsible for this general trend? The reasons are not far fetched. As earlier mentioned, most employees think that use of interviews, application forms, as well as references are the easiest methods that they could employ in selecting candidates for organization. While the use of both the application forms and references may not require the physical presence of the candidates before any selection is done, even when interviews are conducted, interview session is reduced to a mere free discussion without delving so much into the cognitive domain of the candidates.

Secondly, when a candidate is sponsored by either an influential person in the community (politicians, military officer, traditional ruler and a big time contractor), by a member of the interview panel, it goes without saying that candidates would be given some preferential consideration at the interview even when such a candidate does not perform very well like his colleagues. Barring all these factors, a well-structured interview could be near valid a method as the cognitive tests.

On the other hand, selections based on cognitive or aptitude tests and assessment centers, are found to be too technical in approach and therefore not very frequently used by the employers. However if care and time is taken in setting the tests that relate to the actual knowledge of the job, tests generally tend to have greater validity than those methods mentioned above. Since most developing nations have not yet established assessment centers, the use of cognitive test would continue to be most valid method of selecting candidates. Test therefore are found to be quite suitable because of their relative high levels of validity, reliability, objectivity and cost effectiveness in application; but would this effectively call for, greater dedications and a thorough knowledge of the subject content on the part of those who are charged for the responsibility of setting and marking the standard test.

### Table 1: Use of selection method and their validity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Selection method</th>
<th>% Employers using method</th>
<th>Validity a scale of 0-10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>99.4</td>
<td>1-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Application Forms</td>
<td>97.8</td>
<td>1-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>96.5</td>
<td>1-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trainability Tests</td>
<td>31.5</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personality Tests</td>
<td>21.5</td>
<td>2-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive Tests</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment Centres</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>4-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graphology</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


### Table 2: Percentage (%) of employers using various selection techniques

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Selection method</th>
<th>Never used</th>
<th>Used under ( \frac{1}{2} ) of vacancies</th>
<th>Used for about ( \frac{1}{2} ) of vacancies</th>
<th>Used for more than ( \frac{1}{2} ) vacancies</th>
<th>Used for all</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>81.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>67.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological Tests:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personality</td>
<td>64.4</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive</td>
<td>70.0</td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handwriting</td>
<td>92.2</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis</td>
<td>94.2</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bio-data</td>
<td>78.6</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment Centre</td>
<td>78.6</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

tests?

Table II shows a similar trend to that of Table 1. The use of interview and references seems to be popular with most employers, and they feature in all selection processes. The very low number of employers who use psychological tests (personality and cognitive) is as a result of the reasons already explained above and bothering on its complexity.

CONCLUSION

Governments by nature are particularly charged with a variety of functions and responsibilities. From the traditional role of maintaining law and order, governments are charged with the more profound responsibility for the production and equitable distribution of a wide-range of goods and services. Similarly, government has responsibility for policy design and implementation in support of variety of defined social political and economic objectives as stated by La Palombbara, (1971). In carrying out these responsibilities, Weber’s option of ‘best result’ should inform the decision of policy makers so that the negative effects of tribalism, nepotism, quota system and Federal character besetting the Nigerian political and administrative landscape can be put aside.

Even if it has to be argued that Weber’s model of rational legal bureaucracy is too rigid for a Federal structure like Nigeria with variegated idiosyncrasies, which Riggs (1964) and Thomson (1964) felt convinced that administrative practices and principles based largely on the Weberian model is characterized by too much control, increased formalism and over centralization of administration which then should give way to development administration. However, the Riggs and Thomson principles of development administration has not gained followership in the third world. Weber’s ideal bureaucracy cannot be taken for granted since it possesses the capacity for any given bureaucracy to deliver the goods. Having to employ the right and best man into the civil service not minding the state or religion of such a person would help to facilitate improved implementation of government policies and programmes which give satisfaction to all as well as being able to mobilize mass support for government action. What is required therefore is a total dis-emphasis on the prevailing principles that promotes sectionalism and favoritism as against the age-old philosophy of excellence, competence and qualification. A final word of advise will be taken from the Fulton (1970) committee report when it said:

The civil service must continuously review the tasks it is called upon to perform and possible ways in which it might perform them; it should then think out what new skill of men are needed, and how these men can be found, trained and deployed.

The Fulton Committee prescriptions ignores the attempts devised by the Nigerian state to justify the need to incorporate such tendencies as quota system, federal character, religion etc, which in the final analysis are used negatively to favour sectionalism.

REFERENCES


