Review of Bureaucracy: A 21st Century Public Administration Imperative

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Abstract

Bureaucracy, an age long administrative system seems to be no longer in tune with modern trend in administration. Its standardized nature affects the envisaged or required easy operation of organizations leading to little or no results in public organizations. The study reviewed bureaucracy vis-à-vis modern administrative techniques like management by objective (MBO), self-efficiency theory (SET), total quality management (TQM), and information communication technology (ICT), as they affect service delivery and productivity in a developing nation with survivor instinct. Content analytical approach was used as a method of investigation. It was discovered that the standardized nature of bureaucracy inhibits individual and group initiative and ingenuity; and that its principles conflict with the natural adaptability law of change thus inhibiting innovations and self-discovery needed to hasten growth and development among its adherents. On the other hand, the modern techniques are flexible and fluid in nature encouraging personal or group initiative, ingenuity, innovation and self-discovery among their adherent. The flexibility and adaptability brings about faster and more prompt service delivery, enhancing profitability and palpable results in both private and public organizations. The paper recommended that bureaucracy should not be discarded but bereviewed to suit the administrative requirements of large modern organizations. It also suggested that modern administrative techniques be imbibed by public organizations to enable them key into the millennium development goals by 2020.

Keywords: Bureaucracy, Developing Countries, Administrative Techniques, Suitability.

Introduction:

Change they say is the only thing that is permanent. Most countries in the southern hemisphere are poor and unindustrialized. They are referred to as developing countries. Most of their economiesare weak, poor and unproductive due to largely because of system of operation in the publicsector. There is inept leadership, corruption, incompetence, inefficiency and ineffectiveness, tribalism, nepotism and all kinds of vices one can think of. All of these lead to unproductive labour force which in turn results in lack of social infrastructure and economic growth and development in the countries concerned, coupled with dismal negative attitude andthe dictum that government business is no man's business. The world is now a global village and these developing countries want and really need to be in tune and abreast

with the fast moving pace of the world. To key into this, the practice of bureaucracy would appear as a cog in the wheel of such nations because of its standardized and stereotype system of operation.

This paper therefore is intended to review the practice of bureaucracy *visa-a-vis* some modern administrative techniques with a view to transforming the system to a more effective and result oriented system.

Developing Countries

Developing countries are nations that passed through colonial rules. Such nations are found mostly in Africa, Asia and Latin America. They are located at the southern part of the world varying in size, level of development, socio-economic and political structure. They exist on the periphery of the developed countries (their masters) and so share fundamental traits of poverty, weak and defenseless economies; and are generally powerless in the world arena (Egonmwan, 2001). The implication of the above scenario is that these countries experience mass poverty, unemployment, increased destitution, high infant and adult mortalities, low life expectancy, rural-urban decay and migration, unfavorable balance of trade and a host of other socio-economic woes. In view of the above mentioned situation, countries faced with these challenges are naturally subjected to survivor instinct. They need to quicken and increase their productivity and service delivery system to be able to tackle the enormous challenges of infrastructural decay and corruption in their countries. To this effect, bureaucracy which is a standardized system with rules, regulations, and procedures appears not to be in tune with the speed and urgency required by these countries intheir bid to survive and be relevant in the world arena.

Bureaucracy

Bureaucracy is a structure with highly routine operating tasks achieved through specialization, formalized rules   and regulations, tasks that are grouped into functional departments, centralized authority, narrow spans of control and decision making that follows the chain of command (Robbins & Judge, 2007). It is the brain child of Max Webber, a German sociologist. He used the term in his description of a rationalized and efficient government organizations and administration of industries. The term was coined by a French man called de Gourney in the middle of 18th century.

Encyclopedia Britannica defines bureaucracy as that "which signifies the concentration of administrative power in bureau departmentsand the undue interference by officials in matters outside the scope of state interference". On the other hand the dictionary of social science as cited in Fadia & Fadia (2008) defines bureaucracy as a "type of organization characterized by rationality in decision making, impersonality in social relations, routinization of tasks and concentration of authority".Bureaucracy has often been characterized in negative terms. To some people, it is a body of soulless, inflexible and routinized activities embedded with endless rules and regulations. Others see Bureaucrats as non-intelligent, inhuman and anti-people group who lack the least initiative to act but must be tied to the apron of the rules and regulations that guide their organizations. To others still they are rigid, unresponsive, arrogant, less adaptable to changes in environment and resistant to any kind of change.

However, (Weber, 1964-1920) warned that Bureaucracy should not be confused with civil service, thatit isa sociological concept of rationalization of collective activities that describe a design of organization which assures predictability of the behavior of employees. To him, therational Bureaucracy is characterized by specialization, formalization, departmentalization, centralization, narrow spans of control and adherence to a chain of command.

Modern Administrative Techniques

Some of these techniques include:

- Management by objective (MBO)
- Self-efficacy theory(SET)
- Total quality management (TQM)
- Information communication technology (ICT)

MBO Management by Objective

This is an alternative approach to traditional system of administration .It is averse to rational Bureaucracy.Robbins and Judge (2007:1999) define management by objective as a "programme that encompasses specific goals, participative set for an explicit time period with feedback on goal progress". This implies that it emphasizes participative set goals that are tangible verifiable and measureable; converting the overall objectives of the organization into specifics for units and individuals.

In this system, superiors and sub-ordinates jointly determine specific performance objectives and these objectives are periodically reviewed to assess the extent of performance; based on that rewards are awarded to deserving units and individuals. Here, objectives are also translated into specifics for each succeeding level starting from either "bottom up" or "top down". MBO provides opportunities for specific personal objective and each member of staff identifies specific contribution to make for easy attainment of the units goal. This in turn facilitates the realization of the organizational goals.

Self-Efficacy Theory (Set)

This is a management theory which refers to individual belief that he/she is capable of performing a task. This theory states that the higher the self-efficacy ofan individual, the more confidence in him that he will succeed. When this self-efficacy is low, the individual lacks self-confidence and finds it difficult to face challenges. This result to either putting in less effort or even bowing out completely.

It should be noted that goal setting theory that is MBO and self -efficacy theory do not compete; rather they complement each other. It takes a person with self -confidence to carryout challenging specific tasks. In self-efficacy theory, a lot of initiatives and ingenuity are required and the result in performance evident and empirical. There is no buck passing as a result of rules, regulations and procedures. Workers are allowed to make use of their discretion, not tied to the apron of standardization. Consequent upon this, high productivity is achieved; quality and efficient service delivery is also in place.

Total Quality Management

This is an integrative philosophy for consciously assessing the quality of products, services and processes. It was developed by a number of American management consultants. The consultants include: W. Edwards Deming, Joseph M. Juran and Amand V. Fiegenbaun. This idea works on the premise that the quality of products, services, and processes is the responsibility ofeveryone who is involved   with the creation and consumption of the product or services offered by an organization. In other words, it capitalized on the involvement of management workforce, suppliers and even customers to meet or even exceed customer or client's expectations. Schroeder (2001), in http://www//wikipedia founction.org, identified nine common TQM practices as:

- Cross functional product design
- Process management
- Supplier quality management
- Customer involvement
- Information and feedback
- Commitment leadership
- Strategic planning and
- Cross-function training and employee involvement

It is a management approach to long term success through customer or client satisfaction.

Information Communication Technology (ICT)

According to Wikipedia (The Free Encyclopedia), the term is used to refer to the convergence of audio-visual and telephone networks and computer networks through a single cablinger link system. It is often used as an extended synonym for (IT), but it is a more specific term that stresses the role of unified communication and integration of telecommunications (telephone lines and wireless signals), computers as well as necessary enterprise software, middleware, storage and audio-visual systems which enable users to access, store, transmit and manipulate information. ICT has impacted positively on office operations especially in automation and productivity. Communication and feed- back are made easy and fast in both private and public organizations as a result of ICT. Through ICT,the world has become a global village and people can transact big volumes of business with any company in the world from ones sitting room.Other types of IT that facilitate private and public administration/management are: Electronic mail (E-mail), electronic data interchange (EDI) modem, and desk-top computers.

Conclusion

From the foregoing discourse, the characteristics and operations of bureaucracy and modern administrative techniques are x-rayed. There is no gainsaying the fact that bureaucracy remains relevant in the administration of large organizations like government ministries and multi-national organizations; but this paper is suggesting a review of the system to be abreast with the goings on in a fast moving society.

Comparing the two systems, one can discover that bureaucracy is standardized with rules, regulations and procedures that inhibit innovation, ingenuity, individual and group confidence. It is also averse natural adaptability to change. The implication is that organizations that adhere to Bureaucratic principles are slow in operation and are hardly result oriented in both productivity and service delivery.

On the other hand, the modern administrative principles are flexible and fluid in nature thereby encouraging individual and group initiatives, ingenuity, innovation, creativity, self-discovery and self-confidence. These encourage productivity, service delivery, and palpable results achieved for socio-economic political and infrastructural growth and development.

Recommendation

The paper therefore recommends that:

1.   Bureaucracy should be reviewed to be in tune with modern administrative techniques since emphasis is now on palpable results from public organization. Thus public management is much in vogue and encouraged.

2.   The use of modern administrative techniques should be imbibed for accelerated national growth and development.

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