

**NIGERIAN JOURNAL OF PUBLIC
ADMINISTRATION AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT
UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA NSUKKA**



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Volume xxi, No.1 April 2020

NJPALG Publications available online at www.njpalg.org

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A THEORETICAL DISCOURSE ON PERFORMANCE EFFECTIVENESS ISSUES IN GOVERNMENTAL INSTITUTIONS IN NIGERIA

By

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Abstract:

The role of governmental institutions and the problems that bedevil them have been widely discussed in the literature of public policy and administration. The importance of effective governmental institutions for national development has also been well established by scholars. Elsewhere, efforts in the study of performance issues of governmental institutions have explored the link between public sector organizational performance and the implementation of standard managerial tools and methods (Ritz, 2009). The existing literature shows that whereas many scholars are focused on the importance of governmental institutions and their fragility in the national environment, some others are looking at the solution mode of how to bring about functioning institutions in the governance space. However, there is a paucity of focus within the existing literature on what actually are the measures of good performance of governmental institution; and what specific characteristics should be aspired to or what factors should be brought into being in order to establish best practice governmental institutions in a society, such as Nigeria. In this study, we dwelt with these questions of measures of performance and conditions for good performance of governmental institutions and were able to establish the measures of best practices in the functioning of governmental institutions. We were also able to identify the enabling conditions for effective performance of governmental institutions.

Introduction

Existing literature shows that whereas many scholars are focused on the importance of governmental institutions and their fragility in the national environment, some others are looking at the solution mode of how to bring about functioning institutions in the governance space. Some attention has also been placed on finding solutions to broad socio-political issues by leveraging the

governmental institutions, for example through institutional reforms (Effiom, Samuel & Opue, 2011).

There is, however, a paucity of focus within the existing literature, on what actually are the measures of good performance of governmental institutions, and what specific characteristics should be aspired to or what factors should be brought into being in order to establish best practice

governmental institutions in a society. For example, there are some outlines of the indicators of governmental effectiveness, that include the following (Millennium Challenge Corporation, n.d.):

- quality of public services,
- quality of the civil service and its independence from political pressures,
- quality of policy formulation and implementation,
- credibility of the government's commitment to its stated policies.

These indicators however are seen to be generalized and not readily amenable to any concrete measures.

We are of the view that the existing literature have not meaningfully addressed the salient questions of performance effectiveness measures, especially with respect to the specific situation of governmental institutions in Nigeria. For this reason, we want to dwell with this question and also of the identification of the necessary conditions for good performance of governmental institutions. We need to address the questions, what constitutes best practices in the functioning of governmental institutions and what are the conditions precedent for good performance.

In order to put our study into context, we shall reflect briefly on the three main approaches to the study of institutions, as follows:

- **Political Approach** – this conceptualizes institutions as schemes and structures for struggle and use of power. Institutions facilitates the use of power. They implement the results of power play. They are the instruments for actualizing the resultants of power struggle. Political outcomes manifest in the work or actions of institutions.
- **Leadership Approach** – This approach holds that the role of leaders is to establish appropriate institutions for the attainment of visions. Institutions reflect the quality of leadership in any setting. This is a descriptive approach which describes institutions against the backdrop of visionary leadership. Institutions are good or bad depending on their links to a vision of a leadership.
- **Management Approach** – This approach focuses on performance, efficiency, effectiveness of institutions. It addresses the question of how well institutions function – functional approach. It is about how

well institutions operate to deliver the functions for which they are set up.

In this study, we would be adopting the management approach and a framework of **Functionalism**, whereby institutions are understood as structures with specified functions. Our examination of the performance of institutions shall therefore be done within the context of the functions stipulated for the institutions.

Against the foregoing background, we make the following suppositions with respect to the thinking and understanding of the measures of institutional performance and the enabling conditions for performance effectiveness:

- The measure of performance of a governmental institution is essentially the perception of the extent to which the institutions delivers effective service to the public.
- The conditions necessary for effective performance by governmental institutions include:
 - Existence of project management related Critical Success Factors (CSFs).
 - Existence of Standard People Management Practices that include, Goal Setting, Periodic

Reviews of Progress towards the Goals, and application of Consequence Management for delivery or non-delivery on the goals.

Building on a foundation of qualitative methodology, this article is organized to begin with definitions of the concept of institutions and by way of elaboration highlight the functions of typical governmental institutions. We would then examine the subject of performance of governmental institutions in terms of the indicators or measures of performance. Finally, we would explore the ideas around the factors and conditions that need to be in place in a governmental institution setting for that organization to be able to deliver good performance.

The desire to have functional institutions in the socio-political space is founded on the importance and usefulness of such institutions. There seems to be a reasonable consensus among analysts that effective and functional institutions would go a long a long to supporting the aspiration of political and socio-economic development, especially in the developing countries (Abah, 2018). This view is buttressed by the fact that a main political feature of the developed

countries is the maturity and development of their political and governmental institutions.

Achieving clarity about the measures and factors of institutional performance are therefore desirable imperatives towards the goal of political development in a country like Nigeria. Also, and on the basis of the argument that whatever can be measured can be improved, we opine that this study will contribute to a clear understanding of what makes institutions functional and also point to the ways and means of entrenching good performance standards and practice in governmental institutions in Nigeria.

Appreciation of the Concept of Institutions

As a concept, an institution is essentially a system of structures (such as laws, rules, etc.) and the agents operating within them. There are five basic or primary institutions of a society, namely the family, government, economy, education, and religion. These five primary institutions are found among all human groups. Institutions are essentially the frameworks - cultural, political, legal, economic – around which a society is built. As structures (social arrangements that determine the actions of the individuals) or mechanisms of social order; they govern the behavior of a set of individuals within a given community.

Institutions formulate and enforce societal rules and constraints which guide individual choices and behaviors, (Urpelainen, 2011).

Our discussion in this paper is located within the governmental institution which function mainly to facilitate social and economic development. Governmental institutions are formal organizations created by the government. From a functionalist point of view, governmental institutions perform administrative functions through the use of non-political actors. The administrative function is underpinned by policy implementation responsibilities, with impartiality and integrity as watchwords of the actors (Peters, 2014). It is worthy of note that the administrative function of governmental institutions are normally aligned to roles of the state – regulatory, social service, welfare, enabling (Horton, 2006).

Although an institution is a system of structures and actors, institutions must be distinguished from political actors. Political actors operate within the framework of institutions which themselves survive each political actor. Strong political institutions ensure that no individual political actor could create undesirable political crises whilst in political office. One of the big issues in African political scenes is the prevalence of

democratic institutional inadequacies which explain the equally rampant cases of political crises. In Nigeria, for instance, the inadequacies of public institutions are so rampant and have been associated with the prevalent issue of corruption in the country (Ubi, Effiom & Mba, 2011).

Institutions must also be distinguished from culture, although both are linked. A culture develops from the functioning of institutions. In other words, as institutions survive over time, they generate certain cultures which apply to the people operating the institutions. Thus, a functioning institution can create, over time, a pattern of behavior or culture adopted by the individuals within that institution. Such a culture survives the individuals in the institution, such that new operators joining the institutions are able to imbibe those cultural ways and subsequently propagate them. Example, the South African police as an institution was created in an era of Apartheid. Its practices were essentially brutal as it functions to contain and subjugate the Africans. When years later Apartheid was toppled, the behavior of brutality by the Police had remained and surprisingly is being practiced by African police officers against fellow Africans (Institute for Security Studies, n.d., para. 1).

The point is that institutions are structures, and like all structures, they mold behaviors for people within the jurisdiction under which the institutions function. Institutions generally manifest in the form of organizations, in terms of both the formal structures and the informal rules & procedures that structure conduct within.

Governmental institutions are therefore the organizations that are found within the governance systems of a country, where the governance systems are the systems that support governance within the country. In the case of Nigeria, governmental institutions are the organs and agencies of government and include public service organizations such as Ministries, Departments, Parastatals, and Agencies.

Functions of Governmental Institutions

Governmental institutions are bodies responsible for overseeing or implementing government policies and programmes, in welfare or development. They also function to provide public services such as housing, healthcare, education, and financial support for individuals. Governmental institutions are the organs with which the government carries out its major functions including:

- Foreign Diplomacy

- Military Defense
- Domestic Order
- Administration of Justice
- Protection of Civil Liberties
- Provision of Public Goods and Services

Measures of Performance of Governmental Institutions

The big question in the discussion of institutional performance is about how we characterize the subject of performance in the context of the working of governmental institutions? In other words, what does effective performance in the governmental institution space consist of ?

Our observation is that the measure of performance of a governmental institution is both around the output of service to the public by the institution as well as a perception of the extent of this output. The implication of this is that measures of performance is not only the measures in terms of quantity and quality of the services being delivered, but also how the public perceives the effort and output of the institution in question.

From the standpoint of actual service delivery, we note that fundamentally, performance measures are performance standards, and there are typical performance standards which relate to such attributes as

quality, timeliness, or responsiveness to customer needs (Grodén, 2000). It is in this light that we can understand the position that performance of governmental institution is the extent to which the institution delivers the quantity and the quality of services expected by taxpayers (de Waal and Mulimbika, 2017). Here we note that the issue of expectation is what underlines the perception aspect of the performance measures. Poor performance or performance inadequacy is equated with the existence of challenges on the part of the institution in rendering the expected services (Mdhlalose, 2020).

The attention to the subject of perception appears to connect to the efforts at using stakeholder research in the evaluation of organizational performance. Here scholars have tried to look at the experiences and perceptions of relevant stakeholders and to make a judgement of organizational performance on basis of ‘stakeholder satisfaction’ (Brooks, Milne, and Johansson, 2002). Indeed, in the governmental sphere, it has been established that citizens’ perception of the performance itself is fundamental in the assessment of the performance of public or governmental institutions (Dougherty, Lindquist, and Bradbury, 2006). Furthermore, Grönlund and Setälä (2011) in their investigation into the subject of trust in

public institutions, have similarly established that institutional trust depends on people's perceptions of the extent to which institutions live up to some normative expectations, in addition to the public's satisfaction with policy outputs.

Apart from the aspects of services and expectations, performance within an institutional setting is also measured within the framework of Human Resources Management (HRM) practices in an organization. The assumption here is that there is a predictive link between HRM practices and Human Resources outcomes such as job satisfaction, skills, etc., on the one hand, and between such Human Resources outcomes and the organizational or institutional performance (Tsai, Edwards, and Sengupta, 2010). This suggests that we can assess the performance of an organization by looking at the quality of the HRM practices in place in that organization.

From the foregoing discussion it is possible to extract the following as elements of measures of performance standards of governmental institutions:

- Quality and quantity of services delivered to the public.
- Stakeholders Perception/Satisfaction with services delivered.

A good measure of performance of governmental institutions, therefore, will have to incorporate the above elements, summarized as 'a timely delivery of high-quality services that meet the expectation of key stakeholders'. We can infer, therefore, that the measure of performance of a governmental institution could be stated as *a perception of the extent to which the institution delivers effective service to the public*, where 'extent' relates to the quality, quantity and timelines of delivered service; 'effective' relates to perception/satisfaction of the receivers of the service.

For practical purposes, the performance of an institution is also rated in terms of 'delivering on plan', where the plan embodies the measures outlined in the preceding sections. In this direction, an assessment of institutional performance will consist in ascertaining the plan of work of the institution over a period (focusing on the measures) and measuring the delivery against the plan at the end. Usually a top quartile delivery (75% or above of plan) is considered an excellent performance.

Conditions for Performance and Delivery in Governmental Institutions

Having established the manifestations and by extension, the measures of organizational performance in

governmental institutions, we take the next step to look at those conditions that need to be in place for such an institution to be able to deliver expected services to the relevant stakeholders.

The area of project management offers a glimpse of some relevant information on factors necessary for performance and delivery in the context of organizations. This is understandable, given that in project management, performance and delivery are fundamental desirable outcomes. In project management literature, the term critical success factors is the more commonly used term in the description of conditions necessary for effective performance of organizations. In this direction, the following are the common critical success factors for effective project delivery:

- Planning
- Management
- Teamwork
- Communication
- Process
- Tools
- Skills

It is generally expected that the availability of the above factors in the right quality and quantity, and at the right time, will determine the chance of a project achieving its set

objectives or delivering on the expectations of its stakeholders.

The literature of business management also shows that certain critical success factors (CSFs) are needed to be in place for an overall business performance and success (MindTools, n.d.). The following examples are identifiable:

1. Strategic Focus (Leadership, Management, Planning).
2. People (Personnel, Staff, Learning, Development)
3. Operations (Processes, Work)
4. Marketing (Customer Relations, Sales, Responsiveness)
5. Finances (Assets, Facilities, Equipment)

A critical look at the above two groups of critical success factors shows that the CSFs identified for projects can be fitted into the broad range of CSFs for overall business performance. In fact, the project CSFs can be subsumed in the first three CSFs of business performance - Strategic Focus, People, and Operations.

In the case of governmental organizations, de Waal and Mulimbika (2017) have also made recommendations for achieving high performance in such organizations. They argue that in order to move the governmental sector toward better

performance, governmental agencies need to adopt high-performance management techniques such as the technique of HPO (high-performance organization) Framework. In their study of Zambian governmental sector, they found that the HPO Framework is indeed applicable in public governmental organizations, and it can significantly contribute to the sector becoming high performing. The HPO Framework consists of five factors of high performance, with each factor consisting of underlying HPO characteristics. The five factors are:

1. Quality of Management
2. Openness & Action Orientation
3. Long-Term Orientation
4. Continuous Improvement & Renewal
5. Quality of Employees

Again, the above five factors can be located within the 3 business CSFs of Strategic Focus, People, and Operations. Furthermore, these same 3 common elements of CSFs (Strategic Focus, People, and Operations) appear to be aligned to a set of three factors that are summarized by Jitpaiboon, Smith, and Gu (2019) as the conditions necessary that need to be in place for an organization to be able to achieve high performance. The three factors are:

1. Project Management Tools,

2. Project Management Best Practices,
3. Managerial Support on the Performance of individuals, teams, and projects.

Let's look at the factors in some details.

i. Project Management Tools: There are at least 7 common project management tools, including **Gantt chart, PERT chart, WBS diagram, Calendar, Timeline, Status table, and Mind map.** The application of these tools is noted to be necessary conditions for success in project implementation and organizational performance (Haughey,n.d.,)

ii. Project Management Best Practices: Project Management Best Practices encompass the issues around clear goal setting and a disciplined and periodic review of progress towards defined goals and targets.

iii. Managerial Support: Managerial Support relates to all the form of support provided to individuals and teams within the organization aimed at enabling them to deliver the required performance. This also includes the application of rewards for successful performance and consequence management for non-delivery.

We note also that the factors of Project Management Best Practice and Managerial Support in the above section also cover what has been described as public service motivation. According to Qi and

Wang (2016) public service motivation consists in managements involving employees in management, in terms of sharing information with subordinates, providing performance evaluation feedback, and involving employees in decision-making. Public service motivation is known to exert a positive and direct effect on organizational performance.

In summary, we state therefore that the various ideas about necessary conditions for institution performance all tie into the **Application of Project Management Tools and Best Practices**, as well as a conscious **Management Support on the Performance of Individuals and teams**. These constitute the enabling environment for bringing about organizational high performance; and this is what can be brought to bear on governmental institutions in Nigeria to get them to become effective and high performing.

In conclusion, we restate that evidence exist to support the view that there are indeed specific measures with which the performance of governmental institutions can be assessed; and that there are certain identifiable conditions that need to be in place to provide an enabling environment for institutions to perform. The establishment of the enabling conditions and the application of the performance measures by those with

responsibility and accountability for leadership of governmental institutions is required in order to place the governmental institutions on the path of performance effectiveness.

In the context of the research on this subject matter, it is our view also that the understanding of performance measures and the conditions necessary for achieving high performance is a good foundation on which to build further efforts in grappling with the objective of establishing effectiveness in the functioning of public institutions, especially in societies that desire to leverage on public institutions for national development.

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