

ADMINISTRATIVE PROBLEM HANDLING IN NIGERIA'S PUBLIC SECTOR: THEORY AND PRACTICE

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Abstract

Public administrators have for a long time faced some challenges in implementing public policies to achieve policy goals. The study analyses the role (s) administrators play and the problems they face in implementing public policies to bring about growth and development in Nigeria. The study utilizes bureaucratic theory and administrative theory as its theoretical frameworks. Based on the documentary and survey research design, the paper revealed the roles administrators play in the implementation of public policies through the POSCORB Model, which involves planning, organizing, staffing, coordinating, reporting, and budgeting within the public sector to handle public problems. The paper also brought to the fore problem solving skills such as dexterity, foresight, flexibility, intelligence, administrative discretion, strategic planning, effective personnel administration, and prudent resource mobilization and utilization, which are required by administrators to solve policy problems. The paper identified political interference, corruption, inadequate funding, self-induced anarchy by the administrator, favoritism and nepotism etc., as some of the challenges public administrators face in implementing public policies in Nigeria. Based on this, the paper recommends the creation of an independent body to oversee the activities of administrators, proper funding, enhancement of parliamentary oversight functions, and adherence to the bureaucratic principle of meritocracy.

Keywords: Public policy; Problem handling; Public administration; Administrative problem; Administrative skills

Introduction

Governments across the world are faced with the need to initiate policies to achieve socio-economic development. Stemming from this need to implement public policies to maximize the welfare of the people, administrative problem handling has become an important aspect of the operations of the public sector across the globe. The inevitability of administrative problem handling is further emboldened given the reality that governments across the world are involved in the task of administration to address public problems according to broad and specific guidelines and policy direction of the given regime or government within agencies, ministries, parastatals and departments to enhance the wellbeing of the populace. This is common in all states, be they socialist, capitalist, or operating on a mixed model; democratic or undemocratic; presidential or parliamentary; federal; unitary or confederal. Ekanem (2016) offers that administrative problem handling has to do with the aggregate challenges which administrators have to face and the problems which they have to solve in the process of implementing public policies. Public policy stretches across the areas of social services, healthcare, environmental protection, education, immigration, security and defense, public financing and budgeting, administrative reforms, etc. that are within the jurisdiction of the government.

Similarly, Ezeani (2006) sees public policy as a proposed course of action which the government intends to implement in response to a given problem confronting it. In the same vein, Adulsalami (1998) posits that "public policy is hard patterns of resource allocation represented by projects and programmes designed to respond to perceived public problems and challenges requiring governmental action for their solution". However, as Ekanem (2012) notes, depending on how specific policies are executed by administrators, the public may attack or applaud a government. The immediate task of any administrator then is to make a decision on the details of how best to handle an immediate problem, whether it is an anticipated problem or a problem that just pops-up in the implementation of public policies (Ekanem, 2016). The difficulty again lies in the fact that when public policies are formulated, the details on how to implement them are never given to the administrator because it is taken that administrators are well grounded in the nitty-gritty of how to utilize the available resources to achieve desired outcomes (Ekanem, 201). The problem for the administrator can then be how to speed-up in decision making and how to utilize the

available material and immaterial resources, tangible and intangible resources, to execute a specific or a range of policies available to meet the needs of a targeted section of society (Ekanem, 2016).

Against the backdrop of the forgoing, this paper demonstrates and showcases the challenges administrators face in the process of implementing public policies as well as the skills required to overcome them. The paper exposes would-be administrators to the problems that are commonplace in administration, especially in public policy implementation. Practitioners of public administration need to be aware of these challenges and difficulties public administrators face in undertaking their traditional function of public policy implementation. The exposure of administrators to these problems enables them to be well placed to ensure quality policy implementation to avoid policy failure. Since public administration is ubiquitous, this contribution will equip administrators not only in Nigeria but everywhere public administration is practiced with necessary skills for effective and efficient policy implementation. The essence of acquiring this knowledge is premised on the fact that one of the features that distinguishes one administrator from the other, and one administrative system in one country from another, lies in the dexterity with which administrators handle administrative problems in policy implementation. As an aspect of scholarship, the subfield of administrative problem handling has not been sufficiently probed into. As an emerging academic field of study within the disciplinary enclaves of public administration, scholars have not directed much attention towards it as to develop it, thereby creating a gap which this paper attempts to fill. It seeks to build theories that would aid in the practice of administrative problem handling. The necessity of this is obvious, especially for developing countries which have had decade-long setbacks in policy implementation. The study will provide administrators and managers with alternative courses of action to surmount administrative and managerial problems. The paper would also be invaluable as it would serve as a foundational material and guide for students, researchers, policy-makers, and practitioners of public administration. As an academic paper, the paper helps in theory building.

In order to effectively achieve the aims of this paper, it is organized into four main sections, starting with the introduction, which gives background knowledge of the subject at hand and its main thrust. A conceptual framework which operationalizes key variables around which the paper is centered follows immediately. This is followed by the theoretical framework. The methodology, which gives insight into the research designs, methods of data collection and analysis employed, follows. The fourth and fifth sections dwell on actual and real processes of public policy implementation and the problems administrators face in the process. This is followed by an analysis that situates the study in theory and practice. Conclusion and recommendations comes last.

Conceptual Clarification

Administrative problems

An administrative problem is an immediate challenge before the administrator that requires the combination of administrative skills, material and immaterial resources, and tangible and intangible resources to meet the ends of public policies to ameliorate an undesirable condition, meet an unrealized value, or need. Ekanem (2021) sees administrative problems as those unresolved issues or methods that are in the process of decision making for implementation of public policies. The seasoned administrator offered that administrative problems may be in the area of human resources, differences in their approach to issues such as insubordination, corruption, breaking of rules, and also in the area of resource acquisition and utilization within the system of an organization. According to Ekanem (2021), administrative problems are primarily, human in nature. Therefore, administrators have to be equipped with a wide range of philosophical, theoretical, psychological, and a large mass of organizational theories about human nature, the nature of the organization, system, and cultural setting of the organization to handle them (Ekanem, 2021).

Administrative problem handling

Administrative problem handling can be understood from two striking perspectives. First, it can be seen as an act or practice, and second as a field of study in public administration. Defining the concept from the first approach, Ekanem (2016) sees administrative problem handling as the aggregate challenges which administrators have to face and the problems which they have to solve in the process of implementing public policies. As an act, it involves the combination of material and immaterial resources by the administrator in the operational activities of administering and discharging the manifold administrative functions and duties as it pertains to the implementation of government public policies in Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs). As an academic field of study, it is a sub-field of public administration that shares the same disciplinary platforms as comparative public administration, local government administration, organizational behavior, and development administration where scholarship is professed. As an academic field of study, administrative problem handling refers essentially to the study of the role (s) administrators perform, the challenges they face, and the skills they have to combine in the course of implementing public policies.

The study focuses on issues such as administrative processes, organizational conflict, management and resolution, administrative problems, bureaucracy, motivation, employee-employer relationships, productivity, personnel administration, program management, organizational commitment, inter-agency cooperation, and the role of science and technology in these. It also dovetails into the study of leadership and personality traits, and how certain personality traits influence individual administrators' approach to handling administrative problems. The essence, therefore, is to produce in-depth knowledge on the importance of administrative problem handling as a vital aspect of the operation of the public sector. Hence, administrative problem handling is both descriptive and prescriptive. It is descriptive because it describes administrative processes, administrative problems and the roles administrators perform in meeting the goals of public policies. And it is prescriptive in the sense that it recommends certain conditions, skills, principles, and ways of administering the human and non-human elements in the organization which, when imbibed, make for enhanced organizational performance. It is through the academic approach to administrative problem handling that we can effectively comprehend the complexities associated with the implementation of public policies.

The study of administrative problem handling generates theories upon which the practice of administrative problem handling is expected to be based. However, the study of administrative problem handling is at an infantile stage in Nigeria and public administration scholarship as a whole. The Department of Public Administration, University of Calabar, Calabar is a known institution where scholars are currently preoccupied by the analytical vent of this area of scholarship.

The scope of administrative problem handling covers a wide range of ministries, departments, and non-ministerial agencies such as parastatals, advisory governmental agencies (National Economic Council and Defense Councils), administrative tribunals, quasi-ministerial agencies, and autonomous governmental agencies (National University Commission, Central Bank of Nigeria, and Joint Admission and Matriculation Board) (Ezeani, 2006). Administrative problem handling is buried in the whole area of the public sector as distinguished from the private sector where public administration is undertaken. Writing on the scope of public administration in Nigeria, Adamolekun (1983) identified key institutions in the public sector of Nigeria within which the activities and functions of government are carried out, which include: the Federal civil service; the 36-State civil service; statutory corporations of the Federal and State governments; companies or enterprises with full or majority ownership by either the Federal or State government; authorities or commissions established by the Federal and State governments; education institutions established or financed majorly by federal or state governments; the Nigerian Police Force; the Nigerian Armed Forces, and the judiciary. Though ignored by Adamolekun (1983), completing the list is the legislative branch of the government which legitimizes public money spending by government agencies. Its oversight function is also an integral aspect of administrative problem handling because it ensures finance appropriated by the legislature is prudently utilized by agencies of government.

Administrative process

Administration generally takes place within the context of an organization, which means the activity of a planned and cooperative effort in which individuals have been assigned functions (Nyong, 2003). Nwande and Ugwuera (2018) explain every administrative organization has

identifiable purposes, goals, and planned systems of cooperation. They assert that how these various activities are carried out constitutes an administrative process. Administrative process is carried out independently by administrative agencies because they are the sole agencies created by the government to carry out assigned functions on their behalf (Nwande&Ugwuerua, 2018)

Theoretical Framework

The analysis of administrative problem handling in Nigeria's public sector is placed within the context of bureaucratic theory and administrative theory in this study. The choice of two theories is that both theories complement the inherent weaknesses of the other and better support the study when combined. Bureaucratic theory forms the basis for the study, while administrative theory helps in the analysis of the role (s) public administrators' play in public bureaucracies in policy implementation.

Bureaucratic theory is the brain child of Max Weber. Weber (1864–1920) was a German Sociologist who has been closely associated with the development of bureaucracy, the concept of which has been conceived in two aspects: as a social mechanism that maximizes efficiency in administration, and as a form of social organization with specific characteristics (Nyong, 2003). Sapru (2013) writes that Weber identified bureaucracy as the most rational and efficient form of organization devised by man. Bureaucracy is rational, in that, it involves control based on knowledge; it has clearly defined spheres of competence; it operates according to analyzable rules, and has calculability in its operations (David, 1974). Administrative theory, on the other hand, is a strand of classical theory that is associated with Henry Fayol, Luther Gullick, Lyndal Urwick, James .D. Mooney, A.C. Reiley amongst others (Obi, Onyekwelu, Onwubiko, & Mohammed, 2016). Administrative theory attempts to find a rational way to design an organization through a formalized administrative structure, clear division of labor, and delegation of authority to administrators relevant to their areas of authority (Grimsley, n.d). Fayol who is an ardent exponent of the theory, rated the human element in an organization as being a vital element needed in administration (Sapru, 2013). He identified six types of abilities which an administrator must possess, viz; physical qualities (health, vigor, and appearance); mental qualities (ability to learn and understand, judgment, mental vigor, and adaptability); moral

qualities (energy, initiative, willingness to accept responsibility, and tact); general education (general acquaintances with matters not exclusively belonging to the function performed); special knowledge (technical, commercial, financial, and managerial), and experience (knowledge arising from the work proper (Sapru, 2013). Nwizu (1999) (cited in Obi et al., 2016) summarizes the five elements of administration (forecasting and planning, organizing, commanding, coordinating, and controlling) given by Fayol. The author provides that administrators need to forecast and plan by choosing among alternatives, building structures (both material and human), effecting orders through supervision and inspection, harmonizing activities by interrelating the various aspects of work, and ensuring that everything occurs in conformity with established rules and expressed commands. However, Gulick improved on the five elements of administration given by Fayol and gave his POSCORB concept, which is Planning, Organizing, Staffing, Directing, Coordinating, Reporting, and Budgeting (Sharma, Sadana, &Kaur, 2012). All these are essential functions performed by public administrators in handling administrative problems.

The application of the theories to the study is based on the premise that the realization of good life for the citizenry is based on how well bureaucrats who are saddled with the responsibility of translating public policy goals from the dream world into reality adopt and adheres to these principles. They also serve as yardsticks for evaluating the practice of administrative problem handling to uncover areas of conformity and departure.

Materials and Methods

To achieve the objectives of this paper, documentary and survey research designs were adopted. In line with survey research design and given the novelty of the subject area, the study relied heavily on getting inputs through a series of structured interviews with Mr. OkonetteEkanmen, a seasoned administrator in the Department of Public Administration at the University of Calabar, Calabar, Nigeria. The interviews were intermittently held in the years 2016, 2020, and 2021. The interviews lasted an hour and were recorded and transcribed for the manuscript preparation. The results were presented through qualitative analysis and text narration to provide in-depth insight into the subject under investigation. This was augmented by a systematic literature review on

topics such as recruitment, motivation, planning, financial mobilization and usage, public policy formulation and implementation within the broader sub-fields of public personnel administration, organizational behavior, and public policy. The article is structured in themes to make it easier to read and follow the treaties in the article.

Administrative problem handling: Roles expectation and requisite administrative skills

Administrative problem handling starts with the identification of a need and/or problem for which government action is desired. When these problems besieging society are so identified by civil society groups, advocacy groups, legislators, the press, government officials, etc., and when pushed onto the policy agenda of government by these remote and proximate policy influencers, as Lindbloom (1959) prefers to call them, public policies are drafted from them and relayed to government ministries, departments, agencies, parastatals, and corporations that have similar mission statement and functions for implementation. Where such a body does not exist, new organizations are brought into existence (Sharma, Sadana, &Kaur, 2012). This is because public policies are not implemented in a vacuum. There must be an institutional and organizational framework for doing that. First, organizations (ministries, departments and agencies) must be created before other processes that are contingent upon the formulation and implementation of public policies arise. Organizations, in themselves, are born out of a need to further the ends of public policies. For example, the two world wars saw the creation of new government departments in Britain and India to accomplish new tasks necessitated by the wars; the problem of refugees created by the partition of India led to the creation of rehabilitation departments both at the Centre and in the States; the need for rationing and control of food articles was responsible for the creation of food departments (Sharma et al., 2012). In Nigeria also, administrative agencies sprouted out of necessity. For example, the need to have an agency of government to design processes or plans to be implemented before, during, and after disasters to prevent or mitigate the impact of disasters like floods and erosion gave rise to the establishment of the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) in 1999. In the same vein, the need to secure peace and to protect the waterways, land, and sea as well as the entire country against internal insurrection and external attacks gave rise to the establishment of the Nigerian Police Force in 1820, the Nigerian Navy in 1958, and the Nigerian Army in 1960. The need to have a national

body to curb corrupt practices in the public service led to the creation of the Code of Conduct Bureau (CCB) in 1979. The need to have a body to assess, collect and account for revenues accruing to the Federal Government of Nigeria gave rise to the establishment of the Federal Inland Revenue Service (FIRS) in 1943; the need to have a body in charge of the registration, regulation and winding up of companies warranted the creation of the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC) in 1990; the need to have an institution to carry out accreditation of state and federal institutions in the country gave rise to the creation of the National University Commission (NUC) in 2002; and the need to have an agency to promote and ensure a cleaner, safer and healthier environment for Nigerians informed the creation of the National Environmental Standards and Regulations Enforcement agency (NESREA) in 2007. Others include institutions like the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC), Code of Conduct Bureau, etc. established to address issues of maladministration.

In Nigeria, administrative agencies are created for the following purposes:

1. To provide certain goods and products: Liquefied National Gas (LNG), Nigerian National Petroleum Commission (NNPC), Nigerian Coal Corporation, and Nigerian Tin Mining Corporation.
2. To render certain services, e.g., the Nigerian Fire Service and the Water Corporation.
3. To manage public assets or revenues, e.g., the Federal Airports Authority of Nigeria (FAAN), the Nigerian Tourism Development Corporation.
4. To implement extant laws, e.g., the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) rules on lending must be followed by banks; the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC) (for conditions as to the quality of products to be consumed).
5. To regulate certain sectors, e.g., CBN for banks, Standards Organization of Nigeria (SON) for the commerce and trade sector, Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC) for the

transportation industry, NAFDAC, and Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC) for registration and incorporation of businesses.

6. To provide advice to the federal or state government through appropriate federal or state ministries (Nwande&Ugwuerua, 2018).

To realize these objectives, public administrators are deeply involved in problem handling. Problem handling involves committal of funds, the establishment of structures and methods, the hiring of personnel, the administering or executing activities, and the securing of policy goals, services and other intended outcomes (Eminue, 2006). Problem handling involves the sum-total of the methods, techniques and styles adopted to resolve administrative issues for achieving policy goals (Ekanem, 2021). Problem handling is essentially a practical activity, as distinguished from problem finding. At this stage, the administrator is concerned with choosing a course of action and seeing that it is properly followed over time to achieve predetermined goals.

Commenting on a wide array of questions that border on the combination of material and immaterial resources to attain the goals of public policy, Ekanem (2012) and Ekanem (2016) contend that the administrator has a wide range of decisions and actions to take. The author posits that if the administrator wants to achieve timing, the emphasis is now placed on the speed with which the actions are performed; if he wants to emphasize on how to rationally deploy resources to execute, then the emphasis will be on efficiency; if he wants to strike equilibrium between efficiency and effectiveness in what is called effective-efficiency, then the emphasis will be on efficient-effectiveness which involves the actualization of significant output which exceeds input so that we have minimum input and maximum output. According to Ekanem (2016), this again depends on how the administrator assesses and how he makes available to himself the quality of the workforce, the dynamics of the workforce and the work environment, the kind of personnel, equipment, resources, and the mindset that is being required. The author reasoned that sometimes the problem might not be non-human resources but human resources who are sensitive beings. This, according to the administrator, is probably the most difficult one to handle because it is not inanimate objects like money, tables, petrol, etc. Therefore, for the author, how to manage this sensitivity becomes one of the hardest problems for the administrator

because he is not working with one person but with several people with diverse backgrounds and perceptions. He observes that the administrator may now have the problem of how to form teams because modern administration functions on a team basis. The administrator must also establish a culture because the kind of culture that subsists within the administrative system influences what goes on in the organization (Ekanem, 2016). How to dexterously select people who do not only have the competencies, but are versed in the organizational culture, according to Ekanem (2016), becomes an immediate administrative problem for the administrator. Ekanem (2016) provides that this is because the non-recognition of the need to operate within the confines of the organizational culture can create additional administrative problems. The seasoned administrator acknowledges that how to socialize every employee recruited into the organizational culture becomes the immediate problem of the administrator.

The administrator should however assign specific areas of policies to be implemented to different teams with deadlines for actualization. This should be followed by monitoring and evaluation against the set deadlines. The administrator should also understand the workforce diversity and personality of the staff in the organization in team creation and appointment of team heads within the various structures and hierarchies of the organization. Thus, the administrator should strive to strike a balance between competency and workforce diversity in the creation of teams and assignment of roles. Staff with a high locus of control and a tolerance for ambiguity, which makes them inclined to assume managerial roles, work under conditions of extreme uncertainty, and favor participatory managerial styles, should be appointed team leaders (Obi, et al., 2016). According to Ekanem (2016), the immediate challenge that confronts the administrator is how to coordinate because he is not working with one team but several teams performing different functions which need to be coordinated to achieve one purpose. Ekanem (2016) admits that one of the professional obstacles the administrator has to handle is how to harmonize the diverse workforce among the teams so created in a manner that it will further organizational goals. Coordination should be more concerned with organizing workers in an organization under a manager who supervises their actions and roles (Gulick, 1937). It should also involve specifying tasks for workers and fitting them into the organization as a whole (Gulick, 1937). Workers can be organized according to purpose, process, by clientele, and by the

place the work is to be done (Gulick, 1937). The administrator also has to choose the appropriate staff matrix that maximizes organizational goals and output, which has to balance between over-staffing and under-staffing, and between quality and quantity to create equilibrium (Ekanem, 2016). This, according to Ekanem (2016), should result in optimum staffing. This function by the administrator is crucial because as Likert (1974:9) emphasizes:

All the activities of an enterprise are initiated and determined by the people who make up that organization. Plants, offices, computers, automated equipment, and all else that makes up a modern enterprise are unproductive except for human effort and the direction of all the tasks of management. Of all the tasks of management, managing the human component is the central and most important task, because all else depends on how well it is done.

The administrator hence has the problem of choosing the right mix of staff in terms of quality and quantity that assures organizational productivity to meet the ends of public policies. According to Ekanem (2016), the administrator has to also handle the traditional problem of administration, which has to do with finance; he has to decide on how best to deploy the finances, which has never been enough. Ekanem (2016) explains that the problem of how to assign the limited resources to different sub-heads and tasks to be executed becomes an immediate challenge and decision for the administrator to make. Ekanem (2016) acknowledges that as a matter of routine, they become a serious problem when the resources available shrink while the tasks have not shrunk. The administrator stressed that how to match the resources available with the enormous task becomes an administrative problem. The administrator contends that this may slow down the public policy implementation process in terms of speed and efficiency because it may also skew the quality of the project. In this way, appropriate financial utilization becomes a crucial aspect of administrative problem handling. Financial appropriation should thus be prudent and effective as much as possible and should aim at the maximization of the highest value of policy outcomes. In furtherance of prudent financial

management by administrators in Nigeria, there are built-in mechanisms such as the 5th Schedule Part (1) of the 1999 constitution which specifies key functions regarding finance acquisition and utilization among government functionaries in the Code of Conduct Bureau, which has been empowered to hear, investigate, and mete out punishment or cause punishment to be inflicted upon cases of abuse of public office (Ekanem, 2012).

The administrator has to manage the human elements within the organization with low locus of control, low self-efficacy, low self-esteem, low work-ethic orientation, and negative affect by assigning them structured and routine tasks, providing them with emotional support, and closely supervising them (Obi et. al., 2016). Handling the sensitivity of this class will enable the organization to leverage more and profit from the section with high locus of control, high self-esteem/self-efficacy, and positive affect who are more confident in their jobs and inclined to high performance, participate in decision making, and foster group solidarity (Ezeani, 2006;Obi et al., 2016). Another problem before the administrator is how to motivate and challenge the workforce to carry out assigned tasks. A system of compensation and rewards should be developed by the administrator which should balance between job and skills, performance and seniority, fixed pay and group incentives, intrinsic and extrinsic rewards, and participation and non-participation of employees (Anam, 2012).

In the contemporary digital world where information communication technology is the most detected term, administrators have to explore the option of incorporating ICT facilities into policy processes to better policy outcomes. According to Ekanem (2016), the problem of adapting first by the administrator, then the capacity to convince his subordinates to adapt to this change may constitute a problem. Ekanem (2016) provides that a problem of transition from the monologue to digital administration which involves automation of administrative processes involving the computerization and connection of departments through a series of networks and software to ensure efficiency in operations may also be an administrative problem the administrator has to solve because the quality of staff he has should reflect the prevailing tendencies, problems, and challenges.

Ekanem (2016) contends that with the enormous challenges public administrators face in implementing public policies in Nigeria, it is expected that an administrator should be a creator, for they have no choice but to be creative to solve administrative problems. The seasoned administrator also pontificates that the work of the administrator is not to wait for these problems. He offers that they must not only anticipate problems, but also nip them in the bud through strategic planning. Administrators also need to exercise some level of discretion in problem handling because when public policies are given for implementation, the details on how to implement them are not given to them. Administrative discretion which the administrator relies on to further the goals of policies also helps in administrative problem handling. When public policies are formulated and handed to the administrator for implementation, some implied powers and discretion are given to the administrator. Administrative discretion is the ability of individual administrators in bureaucracy to make significant choices affecting the management and operations of programmes for which they are responsible (Gordon, 1982). The process of implementing laws involves a lot of discretion and the administrator is to decide how such laws are to be implemented (Agi, 2015). The administrator is expected to exercise that discretion within the ambit of the law lest it amount to illegality and abuse of power (s). Several administrative processes have been framed to ensure the administrator does not act arbitrarily in the exercise of discretion. Both the legislature and judicial branches of government check administrative actions (Berkeley, 1979). The Administrative Procedure Act was passed into law by the United States Congress to ensure administrators operate within the law (Agi, 2015). For instance, the Criminal Procedure Code and Criminal Procedure Act in the U.S., for instance, give details and procedures to be followed by law officers in judicial proceedings (Mainzer, 1973).

Problem handling is a hectic task that requires dexterity, flexibility, industry, and knowledge about administrative principles since administrators are in charge of a series of activities involved in planning, coordinating, staffing, managing, organizing, budgeting, supervising, and the synchronization of all those functions and activities in the public sector so that policy goals are achieved (Ekanem, 2016). Since administration is a human endeavor and not a mechanical contraption, the ability to follow procedures and show sufficient flexibility when the need arises is paramount when implementing public policies (Ekanem, 2016). As a result, some degree of

flexibility, intelligence, and foresight are required because when these are lacking, the endemic administrative problem that normally exists escalates exponentially, sometimes reaching overwhelming proportions that threaten the system's stability (Ekanem, 2016).

The approach and method an administrator deploys in handling administrative problems also depends on his personality and leadership traits. For instance, if the administrator is a democratic/collegial leader, he will be open to forming, interfacing and working with teams across the structure of the organization; he will be interactive, consultative, and receptive of inputs from the teams. If he has authoritarian traits, he will be neglectful and heedless of input from his subordinates; he will prefer to work in isolation with the centralization of administrative functions and the dispatch of discreet instructions to subordinates from which they must not deviate. If he has laissez-faire traits, he will be open to handling the bulk of the administrative functions under his care without monitoring and supervision.

Another vital aspect of administrative problem handling is the management of organizational conflict, which is inevitable in group behavior. Administrators must accept the need to influence the developmental dynamics of conflict as well as eradicating feelings of discord caused by the actual or perceived opposition of needs, values and interests between people working together so that parties' attitudes and actions will lead to better coordination and a more appropriate interdependence (Bercovitch, 2014; Obi, et al., 2016) that guarantees organizational stability and performance.

Substantive issues in administrative problem handling in Nigeria

Several substantive administrative problems are discernable in administrative problem handling in Nigeria. This includes:

1. Power from the Top/Politicization of the Civil Service

The 1979 civil service reforms formally recognized the politicization of the upper echelons of the civil service (Ezeani, 2006). Politicization and overbearing power from political heads have become an impediment to the handling of administrative problems by administrators. Situations

abound in the civil service where bureaucratic decisions are influenced, maneuvered, and, in most cases, altered by politicians for political advantage (Edino, Bisong, & Inakefe, 2021). Administrators are not the political heads of the ministries, departments and agencies. Ministers and commissioners who are political heads lead. Bureaucratic procedures are often breached by political heads and other people who detect administrative action and impose the same on administrators to score a political point or for economic and social convenience (Ekanem, 2016). Public policies, particularly ones that target direct allocation of public values, employment, contracts, and social amenities, favor party gladiators and the faithful disproportionately (Onyishi, 2010). Top-notch members of the dominant political parties in the country-the All Progressive Congress (APC) and the People's Democratic Party (PDP) significantly influence administrative processes with regard to employment, promotion, performance appraisal, and retirement. Unqualified personnel unduly scale through administrative processes because of this estranged phenomenon. This creates problems for the administrator. Another problem is the competence of the administrator himself. How did he arrive there? Is it as a result of favoritism or man-know-man? In the Nigerian civil service, there are live experiences where the profession of a bureaucrat is characterized by a lot of interference, flexibility and politics of administration (Adebayo, 1986). All these are a kind of canopy that towers above the administrator and therefore generates problems (Ekanem, 2016). This makes the administrator to become complacent or nearly helpless because he is overwhelmed by pressure that operates more or less outside of the administrative system's environment (Ekanem, 2016).

2. Decreasing financial resources/inadequate qualified personnel

Administrative problem handling is a task involving both administration of development and development of administration. While the former entails the implementation of public policies to engender development, the later involves increasing the capacity and competency of the administrator to meet policy goals. The point is that both finances and qualified personnel are needed in the right mix to attain policy goals. This has not been the case in Nigeria. The endemic situation has been that either funds are lacking or quality human resources are inadequate. This affects the work of administrators.

3. Corruption

Administrative problem handling in the public sector is bedeviled by corruption. Administrative processes are not spared from corrupt practices as resources that are earmarked in the budgetary profile for the implementation of policies, projects, and programmes of public concern are privatized and depleted with financially devastating explosives. This reinforces and creates the immediate challenge of the dearth of financial resources for the implementation of public policies, which makes the administrative problem(s) intended to be solved not go away but endure. The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC), as agencies established to abate corruption in the public sector, have had their own challenges in fighting corruption, ranging from defective arrests, trial and prosecution of public officials, and indictment of personnel of the agencies involved in corruption. A close example is the suspension of the erstwhile chairman of the EFCC, Ibrahim Magu, over issues of mail-administration and unaccountability with recovered lots.

4. Inadequate mentorship/coaching

A cardinal challenge in Nigeria's civil service that relates to administrative problem handling is inadequacy of mentorship and coaching. Mentoring and coaching involves attaching a younger/inexperienced administrator to a senior, seasoned and experienced one to understudy him to tap from him those necessary rare skills and the approach he has to problems solving while also changing his values and perceptions into an optimistic approach (Anam 2012; Ekanem, 2016). Mentorship and coaching are grossly inadequate in the civil service where experienced and seasoned administrators retire with the knowledge they acquired without being passed on, which disrupts continuity, which ordinarily should bring stability and sustain the tempo of the organization (Ekanem, 2016).

5. Lack of full implementation of reports by administrative tribunals and panels of enquiry

In an attempt to solve administrative problems over the years, panels, commissions and committees have been formulated to study and unravel administrative problems. But experience shows that reports and recommendations of committees and panels of enquiry are often ignored and not implemented. An example is the Oronsaye report. President Goodluck Jonathan established the presidential committee on restructuring and rationalization of Federal government parastatals, commissions, and agencies, led by Dr. Steve Oronsaye, on August 11, 2011 to determine the configuration of government agencies and to determine which should be merged or scrapped to reduce government spending and free funds for much needed capital projects across the federation (Ujah, 2020). It had far-reaching recommendations. But none of these recommendations have been implemented. Similarly, most of the recommendations of the Harragin Commission, Foot Commission, Gorsuch Commission, Mbanefo Commission, and Udoji Review Commission have hit the brick walls of bureaucracy and military perception (Eminue, 2006). The resultant effect is that the enduring administrative problem will not go away but remain. Lack of political will, vested interests, conspiracy, and opposition from the bureaucratic class and privatization of public funds are some of the factors behind the failed implementation of reports of these panels, commissions, and committees.

6. Favoritism and nepotism

In the Nigerian civil service, administrative functions such as employment, training, appraisal, promotion, remuneration, and retirement are often treated with non-administrative criteria such as political ties, religious affiliation, kinship ties, favoritism or outright money considerations. Administrator knows that there are bureaucratic ideals and ethos in line with Max Weber's bureaucratic theory that govern all those processes that have to do with meritocracy, the capacity to acquire, prove, and exhibit technical skills in the area that one professes (Ekanem, 2016). But the administrator goes ahead and performs those administrative functions using clan-based thinking. Experiences within Nigeria's civil service show that administrative decision making is hardly a rational and objective process. Administrative and policy decision making are often couched in primordial sentiments and factors of political affiliation, administrative convenience, sectional interest, etc. In the country's public service, it is a near impossibility for a job seeker to

get employment without knowing someone who is in a strategic and advantage position in the organization or outside (Amaech, Madu&Ayeni, 2019). This is so because religious, political, and ethnic affiliations are viewed with great importance. Okoli (2003) calls this tragedy Cognitive Melodrama. He submits that for you to get employment in the public sector, one will have to know somebody that knows somebody. Riggs (1974) wrote about scenarios of this nature when he talked about formalism within his Prismatic Sala Model as a distinguishing factor of administrative systems of third world counties which explains the discrepancy that exists between the prescriptive, formal and the impression given by law and the constitution and actual practices. That is, the extent to which what is described as "administrative behavior" is actually determined by non-administrative criteria (Riggs, 1974). The public service rules are clear but they have been violated over and over again because of the influence that permeates through administrative boundaries and afflicts the system (Ekanem, 2016).

7. Self-induced Anarchy by the Administrator

Administrators have the onus of self-discipline because of the issue of hierarchy (Ekanem, 2016). Administration is one kind of profession that has hierarchy built into it (Ekanem, 2016). Hence, there is every tendency for those who are at the apex of the hierarchy to take advantage of their height and position to institute self-induced anarchy (Ekanem, 2016). Self-induced anarchy is a situation where the administrator decides not to obey the laws or rules governing the organization (Ekanem, 2016). It is the duty of the administrator concerned to start from himself and discipline himself, and be able to be involved as much as possible because those who are under him are bound to be influenced by this attitude (Ekanem, 2016). Ekanem (2016) posits that this is what causes bureaucratic bottlenecks, which are attributable to the human element which refuses to do what they are supposed to because of the problem of not disciplining oneself at the upper levels of organizational hierarchy. The bureaucratic bottle neck is that something gets stored somewhere, where administrative tasks and problems are abandoned (Ekanem, 2016). Self-induced anarchy is a characteristic attribute of the Nigerian civil service where administrators exercise administrative powers according to their own whims and caprices without recourse to administrative principles and procedures.

Implications for theory and practice

Bureaucratic theory normatively provides insight into the guiding principles (e.g., meritocracy, impersonality, rationality, etc.) on which bureaucracies are supposed to be based, while administrative theory suggests that administrators need to possess some skills (technical, initiative, adaptability, and dexterity) to enable them to undertake some administrative functions. However, this study indicates bureaucratic principles are flagrantly violated by administrators in the course of implementing public policies in Nigeria. Political interference, self-induced anarchy by administrators, nepotism, favoritism, inadequate finance, insubordination, etc. makes the practice of administrative problem handling in Nigeria to be devoid of rationality, objectivism, transparency, and accountability. This phenomenon influences administrative practice such as planning, organizing, staffing, directing, coordinating, reporting, and budgeting which generate problems that causes policy failure. This tends to create variance between theory and practice.

Conclusions and recommendations

Administrative problem handling is a crucial aspect of the operation of the public sector. How best and how well administrative problems are solved makes for tangible actualization of public policy goals. Since the wellbeing of the citizenry is directly tied to the quality of public policy implementation, it is given that administrators should possess high administrative skills which are associated with administration. Since public sector governance is all about problem finding and problem solving, administrators should acquire commensurate administrative skills to harness workforce diversity with resource utilization to attain public policy goals. Without these skills and tangible resources, administrators are bound to be overwhelmed by administrative and managerial problems that would sum-up to negatively afflict the system and the quality of policy outcomes. This is an inescapable concern, as the legitimacy governments enjoy is also tied to the quality and tangibility of public policy outcomes.

To address the problems public administrators encounter in handling administrative problems in Nigeria, the following recommendations should be adopted:

1. Legislative oversight function should be enhanced. Reports from such fact finding activity on the operations of MDAs should be adopted and implemented to the letters. Oversight function should be done to fathom administrators' compliance with rules and procedures. When administrators know that they are being monitored, which comes with both rewards and sanctions, it will serve. Panels of enquiry and committees should also be instituted to check the operations of public administrators. Reports of administrative panels and committees should also be implemented. Whoever is doing the monitoring, and whatever agency administrators are reported to should also be willing to take appropriate action(s). This could address the problem of self-induced anarchy and breach of public service rules.
2. Administrators and governments at large should consider the option of investing in Information Communication Technology (ICT) and developing training programs that meet the changes and needs of the organization. This approach would transform administration from the traditional type to e-administration, especially in the current century where administration is heavily dependent on ICT.
3. The administrator should cash in on the gains of whistle blowing by publicly admitting and expressing concerns over undue influence that blocks and impedes the wheels of administration. The government should also create an institutional and legal framework for the implementation of the whistle-blowing policy. Anonymity and constitutional protection of public officers who leverage on the facility to complain about some administrative issues such as undue political interference are protected.
4. An objective periodic assessment and appraisal of the workforce should be done in line with the civil service rules and merit system. Promotion, remuneration, disengagement, and the development of training needs should be based on the outcome of the appraisal report in line with the bureaucratic ethos of meritocracy.
5. Administrators at the lower levels of the organizational hierarchy should be attached to seasoned administrators at the upper level of the organization structure to learn and

understudy their peculiar approach to solving administrative problems. This will create stabilize and make for better output and productivity.

6. Adequate finance and supporting infrastructure should be made available to the administrator. Aside from ensuring improved budgetary allocations, public administrators should set deadlines for the various phases public policies implementation. Policy evaluation should be done periodically against those set deadlines.

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