ORGANISATIONAL DECISION-MAKING EXPERIENCES OF NIGERIAN POLYTECHNICS

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Abstract

The significance of participatory decision-making has received world wide acclamation by management scholars. This study, therefore, focused on the nature of participation, pattern of participation and the appropriateness or otherwise of rational participatory decision--making processes in polytechnics in northern Nigeria. It was found that other than Heads of Departments and Deans, other academic staff are not involved in the decision-making processes in polytechnics in northern Nigeria. Where decision-making involved other members of staff, expertise and competence were crucial for selecting who participates. Autocratic pattern of decision-making was found to be the commonest among the institutions. Based on these informed findings, relevant and practicable recommendations have been advanced to improve the practice of decision-making in the polytechnics.

Introduction

Polytechnics, the tertiary technology institutions in Nigeria, exist to achieve some specific goals of teaching, learning, research and growth of citizens, among other goals. The polytechnic Head, the Rector's functions are to manage people, tasks and resources in order to achieve these aforementioned goals. All the activities of the institutions' management, whether working with the public, the management ranks, academics, Board of Directors, staff or students' unions, ultimately contribute to this end. In this process, both conscious and unconscious processes are involved. When these processes are conscious, then decision making is already evoked and is in use.

The polytechnics Heads are always faced with the situation where selection of best alternatives is consciously made to satisfy certain wants or needs or to solve some problems all with the aim of attaining the institution's goals.

The structure of the polytechnics in Nigeria in general and in the northern part in particular have become more complex because of emphasis on technical education and its attendant results of tremendous increase in students' enrolment, number of staff; increase in the number and nature of different programmes run by the polytechnics; a high increase in the quantity and quality of facilities, materials and equipments in them; and the corresponding financial resources in the polytechnics. For example, the Federal Polytechnic, Kaduna in the 1997 academic session had a student population of 24,000 undergoing 173 different programmes in 30 academic departments spread among four colleges (the "Spider, 198:3). This structure has resulted in administrative problems particularly in the area of decision-making. A situation such as this culminates in having

issues affecting staff and students almost left unattended to. Thus, apparently, a lot of human and material resources are wasted in these polytechnics. Indeed, this may be a strong contributing factor to poor students' performance in the polytechnics, which has direct bearing on other lower levels of education because some of the graduates of the polytechnics find themselves in classrooms as teachers.

A case in point of students' poor performance is in the Kaduna Polytechnic. During the 1995/96 academic session, students who obtained diplomas at lower credit and below constituted 73.5% for Higher National Diploma (NHD). It was 67% for Ordinary National Diploma (OND), and 83% for Kaduna Polytechnic Internal Training Diploma (KPIT) (spider, 1998:6). This may be partly because teachers, whose teachings set the standards, are not made to be part of the system they operate and belong to (Tonga, 1997). They consequently, feel isolated and frustrated, and many perform below their true capability (Ezenne 1985).

Since there is no monopoly of knowledge by anyone individual, there can be no individual who can claim competence in all fields. Thus, no one individual in any institution such as a polytechnic can offer competent and professional advice on all cases and issues calling for rational decisions. Therefore, participatory or shared decision-making may become the only preventive prescription for a potential volatile and non-productive polytechnic system in northern Nigeria.

Not all administrators encourage and practice participatory decision-making in their organisations. Savage (1968) pointed out that administrators vary greatly in the extent to which they encourage or allow other staff participation in the decision-making process. Such variation may be due to the administrators' value concerning their roles and the staff members; the confidence and trust the administrator has in the ability, sincerity, competence and performance of the subordinates. It needs reiteration here that decisions give rise to policies and plans, which of course are mere intentions when not implemented. The actual task of the implementation rests with all the staff of an organisation. Therefore, there should be participatory decision making, if the implementation is to be successful. The participatory decision-making is also necessary to call in the expertise of different people involved in the act of deciding.

It seems that not so many Nigerian Polytechnics Rectors encourage participatory decision-making and even among the few of the Rectors that try it, fewer still understand the basic principles of participatory decision-making. This is evidenced in the many staff strikes which were caused by faulty decision-making (Tonga 1997).

The state of the art of decision-making seems to be defective in the Nigerian polytechnic. The lack of effectiveness results in cases of stress, tension, frustration, isolation, selfishness, conflicts between the staff and management; between students and staff; between the students and management, among staff themselves and in management ranks and file (Salisu 1996). For instance, the March 1997 staff strikes in Federal polytechnic Bida was due to hoarding of information by the management (Tonga 1997). The same institution went on strike in 1994 and 1995 because of the management poor relationship with lecturers and non involvement of the lecturers or their union on sensitive issues which affect the life of the lecturers (Tonga 1997).

In Nigeria polytechnics, academic staff often Complain of lack of involvement. Consequently wrong decisions are made on issues involving their professional interests such as curriculum matters, selection of text and reference books, disciplinary matters, training, allowances, admissions and general welfare.

It is pertinent, therefore, at this juncture to ask whether these lapses in decision-making which culminate in strikes and strained labour – management relationship are the result of incompetence of the decision makers or they are due to the nature and structure of polytechnics. Could the problem be inherent in the nature of decision making process? Or could some other factors be accountable? The thrust of the study was to investigate the practice of decision-making in the polytechnics with the view of advancing suggestions on how to improve the practices for the purpose of bringing about efficiency in the administration of the polytechnics.

The study was interested in meeting the following objectives:

(i)   To find out (a) who participates in the process of decision-making in the polytechnics (b) The criteria used in selecting the participants. (c) The specific decision issues in which the academic staff are involved.
(ii)   To dig out the patterns of decision-making in the polytechnics.
(iii)   To establish the appropriateness or otherwise of the processes of decision-making in the institutions.

The study was guided by the following presumptions:

(i)   There is a significant difference between the opinions of administrators and academic on participation in the process of decision-making in the polytechnics.
(ii)   There is significant difference between the views of academics and administrators on the pattern of decision-making in the polytechnics.
(iii)   There is significant difference between the views of academics and administrators on the appropriateness of the process of decision-making in the polytechnics.

Decision-making is the process by which a solution is sought to a problem through the process of selective elimination of alternative solutions.

The pattern of making a decision differs according to the character of assent and commitment. Turner (1970) was the first to present three patterns of decision-making; namely consensus, accommodation and de-facto.

The consensus decision-making pattern is adopted when the initial differences among view points are eliminated through discussion, round table conference, negotiation and so forth, until there is eventual agreement. Here, since there is consensus, commitment to carrying out the decision is high and complete.

Accommodation pattern is when some party(ies) give assent to the decision in order to allow a decision to be reached, not because they are personally convinced that the decision reached is the best. Deacon (1975:120) considered accommodation pattern as, "the agreement that comes through accepting the desire of a dominant person when all the views are not reconciled". The danger here is that there may be lack of commitment at the implementation stage.

The De-facto tends to arise from lack of effective consideration or communication of alternatives. Consequently, agreement is reached by the absence of dissent rather than by active assent. And commitment is by course of events rather than by acceptance. Here the implementation is left to fate, chance and situation.

Another pattern of decision-making observed in organisations is the pattern of the use of power and authority. Since 1976, Nickel pointed this pattern out, and defined power, "as the potential influence that one person or group has over another". A person or group may be powerful or influential in decision-making because others fear him/them or because others respect the abilities (Charisma) of the people or because of some other reasons. Authority is the power to influence the decisions which are to guide the actions of others.

The power decision is in a form of power continuum where, on one extreme end is democracy, while on the other extreme end is dominance. In between the two extremes is the co-operative venture or pattern. Dominance refers to the control of the outcome of group decisions where a member is domineering to the extent to which he uses an expressed cohesive power and influence. While democracy is the pattern that allows and takes into consideration the views of all parties and the final decision is taken based on superiority of views and not on personality. It is similar to Turner's (1970) consensus pattern.

The issue of democracy in decision-making process has attracted the attention and comments of scholars. For instance, Hick and Gullet (1976), Afolayan (1981), Udo and Akpa (1994), and Ezenne (1985) all agree that decision-making in educational institutions should be democratised since the staff members possess varied abilities, backgrounds and divergent view points. The administrator stands to benefit from the conglomeration of the varied qualities/possessions of others when he involves them in the process of taking decisions.

Participatory decision-making might be initiated sometimes as some form of tactical play to elicit co-operation in which subordinates are played into leadership roles in order to secure their frank and dedicated support for the decision. Participatory decision-making process requires tolerance and respect for the views of others pursuing a common goal.

Long lasting improvements in school can only occur when teachers are involved in professional decision-making (Rice and Brown, 1998). All subordinates (teachers) would especially desire to have an influence in those areas that relate directly to teaching situations such as introduction of new educational programmes, purchase of teaching and library equipments. Rowan (1995) stated that collaborative and participative management practices unleash the energy and expertise of committed teachers.

Guidelines for involving subordinates in decision-making.
It is not convenient, feasible or possible to involve every one in an institution in the process of decision-making. In most cases, this is true due to the large number of staff or students in the institutions or due to the nature and implication of the decision to be made.

The pertinent question then is how to decide and who is to be involved in the process of making a decision. Lomak in Udoh and Akpa (1994), asserted that, "this is a perplexing question". However, the scholar went ahead to suggest that the degree of involvement in decision-making is often related to the administrator's attitude and style of administration. Vroom (1976) and Tucker (1981) agreed that it may not be possible to involve all staff of an institution in every decision-making. At a point of decision-making, several basic questions are raised to determine the degree to which the subordinates should be involved. The basic questions should be on three relevant criteria:

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1. Expertise: Who knows how to solve the problem? Is it the administrator alone? Is it a particular staff or group of staff? Or is it all staff?
2. Acceptance: Is the staff members' acceptance of the decision crucial for effective implementation? If implementation fails, is it because a staff refuses to go along with the decision?
3. Time: Is there enough time to get staff involved in the process of decision-making? Is the issue so crucial and urgent that immediate decision is necessary? Can time allow all relevant staff participation?

The three criteria of: expertise, acceptance and time vary in importance according to circumstances. Each should be used depending on the situation and on its applicability.

Methodology
The study focused on the process of decision-making in northern Nigeria polytechnics. To do that, three hypotheses were formulated to guide the conduct of the study. The questionnaire and observation instruments were used for data collection from 500 academic staff, and 68 administrators from eight polytechnics out of the total 22 polytechnics in the area under study. However, of the 500 sampled academics, 376 and 43 of the 68 administrators handed back the filled questionnaire copies. The samples used met the sample-population ratio relationship recommended by Roscoe (1969) Best (1970), Krejie and Morgan (1970) Borg and Gall (1989).

The questionnaire instrument was structured into sections namely: participation in decision-making process; patterns of decision-making and appropriateness or otherwise of the process of decision-making in the Institutions under study. Each of these sections had specific question items under it that got out of the required responses from the respondents that could guarantee analysis and subsequent dependable conclusions as per the relevant hypothesis and research question.

The data collected was first presented in tabular frequencies and percentiles, and later subjected to further test by advanced parametric statistical technique, such as One Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

Results and Discussion

Participation in Decision-making Process
Null hypothesis one, 'three is no significant difference between the opinions of administrators and academic staff on participation in the process of decision-making in the polytechnics' had the following as response.

Table 1a: Who participates in decision-making?

VALUE	FREQUENCY	
	Administrators	Academic
HODs	15(34.8.%)	189(50.3)
Other academics	7(16.5%)	35(9.3%)
Administrators	7(16..3%)	93(24.7%)
All above	10(23.3%)	14(3.7%)
No response	4(9.3%)	45(12.0%)
Total	**43(100%)**	**376(100%)**

Table 1b: Criteria used in selecting participants in the Decision Making process

VALUE	FREQUENCY	
	Administrators	Academics
Expertise and Competence	23(53.5.%)	169(44.9)
Time	10(23.5%)	42.(11.2%)
Acceptance	2(4.73%)	83(22.1%)
All above	2(4.73%)	13(3.5%)
No response	6(14.0%)	69(18.4%)
Total	**43(100%)**	**376(100%)**

Table 1c: Specific Decision issues in which the academic staff participate.

VALUE	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
Disciplinary	Administrators	Academics
matters	8(18..0%)	118(3149)
Financial		
matters	2(4.7%)	15.(4.0%)
Welfare		
matters	7(16.3%)	58(15.4%)
Academic		
matters	10(23.3%)	108(28.7%)
All above	16(37.2%)	43(11.4%)
No response	0(00%)	34(9.0%)
Total	**43(100%)**	**376(100%)**

It is obvious from tables' 1a, 1b and 1c that there was a general lack of consensus (agreement) between the academic staff and administrators as to participation in the process of decision-making in the polytechnics under study. For instance, Table 1a shows that while 50.3% of the academics believed that only heads of departments have enjoyed the privilege of participation in the decision-making process, 23.3% of the administrators, opined that the HIODs, academic and administrators all participate in decision making and 16.3% of them went ahead to assert that other academics are involved.

Table 1b shows some level of agreement in expertise and competence as a criterion for deciding who participates; because 44.9% of the academics and (53.5%) of the administrators scored and supported the item. Disagreement was shown on time and acceptance as other criteria for participation as could be seen in Table 1.b.

Again there was disagreement on the matters in which the academics are involved when their decisions are being made. The study noted that 37.2% of the administrators opined that the academics are involved in decisions on discipliy, financial, welfare and academic matters. Only 11.4% of the academics supported the administrators on this matter. Only 15.4% of the academics said they were involved in welfare decisions. This is interesting, since most strikes in the polytechnics boarder on welfare matters as expressed by Salisu (1996) and Tonga (1997).

Table 2: T –test for Differences between Administrators and
Academics on participation in decision-making.

VALUE	n	x	sd	se	T-VALUE	df	PROB. VALUE
Academic	376	1.579	1.097	0.057	-2.83	417	0.005
Administrators	43	2.093	1.36	0.207			

To further confirm these differences in opinion, a t-test for two independent sample groups statistics was used to test the hypothesis. Table 2 has the results.

Table 2 has the academic means scores of 1.5% with a Standard Deviation of 1.097 and a Standard Error of 0.057. While the administrators means score is 2.093, standard deviation is 1.36 and Standard Error is 0.207. The calculated t-value was 2.83 and the probability value is 0.005. The observed t – value of 2.83 is then higher than the critical t-value of 1.96 while the probability value of 0.005 is less than 0.05. This shows, therefore, that there is a significant difference between the view of administrators and the academics on participation in the process of decision-making in the institutions. So, the null statistical hypothesis was rejected.

Modern management theories lay a lot of emphasis on participatory management vide participatory decision-making process in organisations ofcourse many issues tht need urgent decisions-making in organisations may not provide time for the participation of all concerned because the issues must be dealt with swiftly. Such issues, nevertheless need be handled with caution and tact.

There is need for representativeness in decision-making to minimise crises in institutions of learning This is important because there is no one person tht is an epitome of knowledge. The divergence in the opinions of the respondents in this study do not show that there is much participatory decision-making in the polytechnics in northern Nigeria. Akanni (1987:113) has observed that, "the subordinates of an autocrat and self-centred decision-maker are often resentful, quarrelsome, and un cooperative." Tonga (1995) opines that this is due to the fact that they are often not involved in decision-making. To avoid this type of situation as reported by Akanni (1987) and Tonga 1997), the subordinates need to be involved in the decision-making process.

It is, however, to be noted that not every subordinate is to be involved in every decision-making process in an institution. Trucker (198`), has suggested some criteria to be used when considering who is to be involved during decision-making. These criteria include: expertise, time and acceptance on the part of possible participant.

The result of this study, as shown in table 1b, does not suggest that these criteria are used in some instances of participatory decision-making process in the institutions under study. It may be likely that some other less objectives but objectionable criteria are used. This statement seems confirmed at a later part of this study when as much as 20.7% academics and 18.6% administrators pointed that self interest, and the interview revealed nepotism and tribalism, as major hindrances to rational participatory decision-making process in the polytechnics.

Pattern of Decision-making in the Polytechnics

Patterns of decision-making concerns how decisions are finally reached in terms of whose inputs and views are adopted and accepted as the final decision is made

Table 3: Patterns of Decision-making in the Polytechnics

VALUE	ACADEMIC		ADMINISTRATORS	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Consensus	15	4.0	12	27.2
Accommodation	108	28.6	07	16.3
Compromise	58	15.4	05	11.6
Autocratic	115	30.6	13	28.6
All above	50	13.3	05	11.6
No response	30	8.0	02	04.6
Total	376	100%	43	100%

Table 3 shows some discrepancy between the views of the two groups of respondents on the pattern of decision-making in the polytechnics. For instance, while 30.6% academic opined that autocracy is the most frequent pattern of decision-making process, 27.2% administrators said that the most frequent pattern was consensus. It is, however, interesting to note that 28.6% of the administrators agreed that autocracy is frequently used in the institutions; and only 4.0% of academics accepted that consensus is frequently practiced in the institutions. The 28.6% administrators added to the 30.6 academics gives evidence and credence that autocracy is practiced in the polytechnics.

A t-test statistical tool was used to test the data and means supplied. Table 4 below holds the result of the t-test.

Table4: T –test for Differences between Academics and Administrators on the Patterns of Decision-making in Polytechnics.

VALUE	n	x	sd	se	T-VALUE	df	PROB. VALUE
Academic	376	15.949	5.878	0.303	-1.13	417	0.258
Administrators	43	17.000	4.629	0.706			

T = 1.13, P 0.005, P = 0.258

T = 1.113, P O.005, P = 0.258

Table 4 above shows a probability value of 0.258 which is higher than 0.05. And the t-value observed of 1.134 is lower than 1.96 critical t-value. Therefore, the null statistical hypothesis which states that, 'there is no significant difference between the views of academic staff and administrators on pattern of decision-making in the polytechnics' is retained. This is because though there was a difference, it was nonetheless insignificant. The slight difference observed stemmed from the fact that although the academic (4.0%) said consensus is the frequent pattern, as much as 27.2% of the administrators agreed with the academics.

It is worthy to note that researchers have stressed the fact that consensus or democracy as others call it, is the best pattern while autocracy should be avoided. This is because in autocracy or what is also referred to as dominance pattern, the decision could be taken quite alright but the willingness and enthusiasm to comply at the implementation stage remains doubtful. Paulucci (1977) stated that in consensus and democratic patterns, all those involved believe that the best decision was reached and commitment to carrying it out is complete. While Turner (1970) believed that accommodation may be achieved amicably or with bitterness, and ascent may be a response to coercion or involuntary concessions. It is agreement (decision) that comes through accepting the desire of a dominant person when all views are not reconciled.

Observation of notices on some polytechnics Notice Boards showed the choice of diction was largely dictatorial and instructive. This confirms the frequent autocratic pattern, which was accepted and rated high by both groups of the respondents.

Appropriateness of Decision-making in Polytechnics
The respondents were also requested to express their opinions in this survey on appropriateness or otherwise of the process of decision-making in the polytechnics.

Table 5 below portrays a dicey situation in the views of the two independent groups under study. The level of disagreement is not only between the two groups but is found within each of the groups. For instance, as many as 44.6% of academics said the decision-making process is appropriate, almost equal number, 43.2%, opined that the process is not appropriate. This is similarly the situation with the administrators. For instance, though 71.9% said the process was appropriate there were 23.3% of them that said the process was not appropriate, while the rest (4.7%) refused to comment. It is a surprise that table 3 showed academics staff vehemently saying the pattern of autocracy is practiced in the polytechnics, the same academics are of the opinion that the process were appropriate.

In participatory decision-making process, those who directly have a personal stake on some issues should be involved in making the decisions. Hoy and Miskel (1982) said if

subordinates have a high personal stake (high relevance) in the decision, and have the knowledge (expertise) to make a useful contribution, then the decision falls outside the zone of acceptance and in such a situation the subordinates should be involved in the decision-making process. This according to him will increase or bring about appropriateness of the process of decision-making in organisations.

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Decision-making in institutions needs to be democratised because of the benefits of such a democratisation. Ukachi (1986), Ahmed (1993) and Usman (1994) as reported in Udoh and Akpa (1994) all carried out independent and separate studies and all have their findings and conclusions agreed that staff who participated regularly and actively in decision-making process were more enthusiastic about their institution system than those who did not.

Democratic participatory leadership other wise called shared decision-making administration and also co-determinational decision, promotes a higher degree of staff morale and higher devotion. Uyanga (1985) also stated that it makes for increased acceptance of the resultant decision and policies by individuals, and compliance is ensured. She added that communication problems are reduced. There is less surveillance when individual members possess full knowledge of objectives vide shared decision-making process, of the obstacles, difficulties and alternatives that were considered but rejected, and the facts, opinions and projections leading to the decisions that were finally made. Rice and Brown (1998) have asserted that improvements in schools can only occur when teachers are involved in the decision-making process on matters affecting them.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the analysis and discussions in the preceding paragraphs, the following results and conclusions can be reached.

Other than the heads of departments, other academics, probably only through union officials, are not involved in the process of decision-making in the polytechnics in Northern Nigeria. There should be academics representation on matters on staff welfare and academic decision-making process.

It was also found in that in the process of selecting who participates in the decision-making process, acceptance and time availability of the potential participants are not very crucial but expertise and competence are considered. This is good, ideal and can lead to rational decisions made.

It was discovered that academic staff are not often involved in the process of taking decisions that involve their welfare. This is not good and it can breed discontent in the institutions. It is to be noted that the researches by Salisu (1996) and Tonga (1997) both indicated welfare as a corner stone of stability or instability in polytechnics.

The study also revealed that decision-making patterns of consensus, accommodation and compromise are all used; yet both groups of the respondents opined that autocracy pattern is dominant. This may not lead to enthusiastic and frank commitment of the subordinates at the implementation stage. Consensus and compromise patterns are and should be the ideal to aspire to attain.

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