

## **Public Sector Innovation and Service Delivery in Nigeria: A Paradigm Shift from Traditional Public Administration to New Public Management**

By

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### **ABSTRACT**

Innovation in the public sector refers to the significant improvement in public administration and organisational services. It is also the implementation of new improved processes, methods and services by a public sector organisation, which is aimed at improving public sector operations and service delivery. The goal of this paper is to examine the role of New Public Management (NPM) as a framework or paradigm through which government can modernise and re-engineer the public sector. The paper examined the role of innovation in service delivery and how public service delivery can be improved through NPM reforms in Nigeria. The paper stated the importance of public sectors in Nigeria developing sound bureaucratic principles that would be the foundation upon which the NPM principles can be progressively embraced and nurtured. The methodology adopted for this work, in terms of data collection, was secondary source of data collection. The data collected were analysed using qualitative method of descriptive analysis. In the findings, it was concluded that in providing and improving technical, managerial, administrative, and service delivery, as well as leadership skills, it is important to foster quality assurance, efficiency, effectiveness, accessibility and sustainability of services in various sectors and contexts of the public service, as these are core aspects of NPM.

*Keywords:* innovation, service delivery, public sector, NPM

### **INTRODUCTION**

The standard of service delivery in the public sector plays an outstanding role in the economy of many countries in today's global competitive environment. Over the past decade, fundamental changes have been transforming societies all over the world. There has been a significant shift

in the field of Public Administration. This change compels bureaucrats to tidy up organisational aspects in a way that enhances progress. Many developing countries, including Nigeria, are now realizing the need for innovation to provide customer-focused, cost effective and updated methods in improving the public sector service performance. Innovation in the public sector as observed by Awosika (2015) has become increasingly popular around the world as a strategy for improving governance and scaling up quality service. As a result, the shift towards a practice of treating the citizen as a customer has led to a real change in the relationship between the citizen and the public sector. The replacement of the term 'citizen' with the term 'customer' to describe the users of public services exemplify the movement towards characterizing the public sector as an institution that renders quality services to the people. Delivering quality services in all sectors of the public is considered an essential strategy for success and survival. The idea behind NPM is to introduce market-oriented strategies and management methods that will make the public service more responsive.

Improving the public sector has been an essential purpose embedded in the reform movement since the 1970s. This is because there has been a historical tendency for expenses in the public sector to rise faster than those in the rest of the economy (Mulgan & Albury, 2003). Hence, the need for innovation in public service delivery has long been stressed. Now, the public sectors are often under as much pressure to cut cost, reduce waste, and improve efficiency as the private sector. Innovation in the public sector is now recognized as a vital factor in meeting the challenges of globalization and demographic changes while, at the same time, sustaining a high level of service to the citizens (Donahue 2005). This is due to the public sector's potential and tendency to open new doors, reformulate old problems, break policy deadlocks, bring new actors together and formulate and implement new ideas (Sorensen & Torfing, 2012). Public sector agencies, therefore, adopt innovations in response to the constant economic, political, social and technological changes in an increasingly globalized and networked world marked by complex problems, tight budgets, and rising expectations from the citizenry.

## **CONCEPTUAL REVIEW**

### **Innovation**

Innovation in administration refers to changes in the structure and processes of the organisation in the administrative systems, in the knowledge used in carrying out managerial functions and in the management skills that enable an organisation to function and succeed

using its resources.

Osborne and Brown (2011) defined innovation in public service as the introduction of new elements in the public service in the form of new knowledge, new organisations and new forms of management. Thus, innovation represents a discontinuity with the past. According to other authors, innovation means discontinuous change. Vries, Tummers, & Bekkers (2016) stressed that there is no precise or generally acceptable definition; instead, innovation is a discontinuity in relation to the past. Such discontinuity may be in the process, adoption of new technologies, creation of new products and services, and the introduction of new concepts. The objective is to increase efficiency and effectiveness while also increasing citizen satisfaction.

When innovation translates into new ways of operation in public administration, there is a talk of paradigm shift and the appearance of a new model of public management. Such new models have an internal logic that translates into new concepts, new ways of operation, new management instrument, new objectives and new values. Therefore, when examining the models it becomes necessary to identify the disruptions and innovations that followed.

### **Public Sector and Service Delivery**

Since the formation of civil society where men entered into an agreement on the basis of social contract with the government, the question of service delivery has become so pivotal. The social contract arrangement was first envisioned by Thomas Hobbes in his book, *Leviathan*, where he warned that any society in its raw state of nature, that is, without any form of governmental authority, would result into a state of anarchy where the lives of men were brutish, nasty, and short. Hobbes (1994), therefore, suggested a social contract pact where men surrendered their rights under a sovereign authority with the ultimate goal of preserving their lives against violent death. On its part, the government would bear the responsibility of preserving the lives and properties of the citizens against physical or imagined threats.

Under the social contract doctrine, as propounded by Hobbes and modified by latter philosophers, the government has the enormous responsibility of maintaining law and order and providing public amenities. To discharge this task effectively and efficiently, public service emerged as the main machinery of government. Public service, therefore, operates as the structure through which the government responds to the needs of the general public. In other words, public service carries the responsibility of

formulating and executing policies and programmes that enhance the standard of living of the citizenry and deliver other welfare services to the general public. Since the term “public”, according to Jones (1970), refers to the citizens of a particular geographic location at any given time, public service evokes the thought of government involvement in service delivery that is devoid of profit motives. Ogunna (2004) reiterates that the desire to satisfy the public through the implementation of public policies, enforcement of laws, and realization of public welfare is the culmination of effective public service delivery. Public service delivery becomes so paramount because it represents the fundamental structure of nation-building; it serves a tangible link between government and the citizens, and it also promotes the values of nations to the citizens and finally serves as a bond between the state and citizens.

Since effective service delivery remains the overall outcome of public services, measuring the service providers’ level of performance, to keep them in the line of duty, is very essential. On this note, Al-Ghazali (2008:5) identified the following checklist for measuring the capabilities of the public service for effective service delivery:

- Public service should be able to demonstrate effective delivery of goods and services at a low cost and in a timely manner.
- Public service should be able to demonstrate equitable distribution of the services to the people in a fairer and transparent manner.
- Citizens should have the convictions that state institutions and public service respect the fundamental rights of the citizens and demonstrate respect for the laws of the land.
- Public service should be wary of physical force and coercion and should only use legitimate power to command submission.
- The environment should secure citizens to enable them carry out their daily routines without fear or hindrance.
- Finally, there should be equal treatment and dispensation of justice for all citizens without any bias.

Using the above yardstick, the extent to which the public service performs or meets the benchmark of effective service delivery to citizens varies from country to country. This is why virtually all countries of the world continue to constantly reform their public services with a view to ensuring that the delivery of goods and social services is done in an effective and efficient manner.

## **New Public Management**

New Public Management (NPM) is an approach in running public service organisations at both sub-national and national levels. The term was first introduced by academics in the UK and Australia to describe approaches that were developed during the 1980s as part of an effort to make the public service more "business like" and to improve its efficiency by using private sector management models. As with the private sector, the New Public Management focuses on customer service; NPM reforms often focus on the centrality of citizens who were the recipient of the services or customers to the public sector. NPM reformers experimented with using decentralized service delivery models, to give local agencies more freedom in how they delivered programmes or services (Olowu, 2002). In some cases, NPM reforms emphasised the use of e-government to consolidate a programme or service to a central location in order to reduce costs.

Some governments tried using quasi-market structures, so that the public sector would have to compete against the private sector (notably in the UK, in health care). Key themes in NPM were financial control, value for money, increasing efficiency, identifying and setting targets and continuance monitoring of performance, and handing over power to the senior management executive. Performance was assessed with audits, benchmarks and performance evaluations. Some NPM reforms involved private-sector companies in delivering what were formerly public services (Agboola, 2016). NPM advocated the removal of collective agreements in favour of individual rewards/packages at senior levels combined with "short term contracts"; and introduction of private sector-style corporate governance, including using a Board of Directors approach to strategic guidance for public organisations. While NPM approaches have been used in many countries around the world, NPM is particularly associated with the most industrialised OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) nations, such as the United Kingdom, Australia, France, Spain, Canada and the United States of America. NPM advocacies focus on using approaches from the private sector, corporate or business world, which can be successfully applied in the public sector and in a public administration context. NPM approaches have been used to reform the public sector, its policies and programs. NPM advocates claim that it is a more efficient and effective means of attaining the same outcome (Olowu, 2002).

In NPM, citizens are viewed as "customers" and public servants are viewed as public managers. NPM tries to realign the relationship between public service managers and their political superiors by making a parallel relationship between the two. Under NPM, public

managers have incentive-based motivation such as pay-for-performance, and clear performance targets are often set, which are assessed by using performance evaluations. As well, managers in an NPM paradigm may have greater discretion and freedom as to how they go about achieving the goals set for them (Agboola, 2015). This NPM approach is contrasted with the traditional public administration model in which institutional decision-making, policy-making and public service delivery is guided by regulations, legislation and administrative procedures. NPM reforms use approaches such as disaggregation, customer satisfaction initiatives, customer service efforts, applying an entrepreneurial spirit to public service, and introducing innovations. The NPM system allows the expert manager to have a greater discretion. Public managers under the New Public Management reforms can provide a range of choices from which customers can choose, including the right to opt out of the service delivery system completely (Oladoyin, 2010).

### **NPM AS A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

There is an argument that the concept of NPM has inspired the initiation of many reforms to improve public service delivery (Polidano, 1999). The underlying essence of NPM can be explained by the new trend in public administration to imbibe some important private-sector insights and values like efficiency, effectiveness, flexibility, responsiveness, competition, result oriented management, more explicit and measureable performance standards, and accountability. Absorbing these values into the public sector is in order since New Public Management (NPM) is a conceptual framework that originated as a solution to the perceived inefficiencies of traditional bureaucratic system of public administration. The framework is geared towards improving service effectiveness by borrowing private sector management practices.

The NPM framework is centred on result-based management, which involves setting clear objectives and goals, measuring performance against these targets and using this information to continuously improve operations. NPM also stresses on the importance of decentralization and devolution of decision making authority, giving managers and front line workers more autonomy and accountability in their actions. Market-based mechanism such as contracting out services to private providers, introducing competition between public sector agencies and charging users fees for services are also integral to the NPM framework. These mechanisms introduce market-like incentives into the public sector and encourage greater efficiency and innovation.

Additionally, NPM emphasizes the importance of customer service and citizen engagement, with public sector organisations expected to focus on meeting the needs and preferences of the citizens and involving them in the design and delivery of public services.

In essence, NPM represents a significant shift from the traditional approaches in public administration to a more decentralized approach. While some have criticized NPM for its reliance on market-based mechanism or its possible negative impact on public sector values, others credit it for driving innovation and improving the efficiency and effectiveness of public service in many countries.

Edwin (2011) has listed NPM's main elements from which much of the agencification ideas can be discerned. According to him, the key NPM reform elements include:

- *Hands-on professional management* in the public sector. This means allowing the managers to manage. The typical justification for this is that accountability requires clear assignment of responsibility for action.
- *Explicit standards and measures of performance*. This requires goals to be defined and performance targets to be set. This sets out the basis for judging performance.
- Greater emphasis on *output controls*. It reflects the need to stress on results rather than administrative procedures.
- A shift to *disaggregation* of units in the public sector. This involves the breaking up of large entities into “corporatized” units that are task focused.
- A shift to greater *competition* in the public sector. This involves the move to term contracts and public tendering procedures.
- A stress on greater *discipline* and economy in public sector resource use (cutting direct costs, raising labour discipline, limiting compliance costs to business).
- Stress on *private-sector styles of management practice*, moving away from traditional public service to more flexible pay, hiring, rules, etc (Edwin and Gbaragaye, 2011).

It is within the ambit of NPM theory that any effective reform of the Nigeria public service can be situated.

## **THE NEED FOR PUBLIC SECTOR REFORMS IN NIGERIA**

Public sector reform is about strengthening the way that the public



sector is managed. The public sector may be over-extended in attempting to do much with too few resources. It may be poorly organized; its decision-making processes may be irrational; staff may be mismanaged; accountability may be weak; public programmes may be poorly designed and public services poorly delivered. Public sector reform is the attempt to rectify these problems. Public sector reform has become a priority on the political agenda of governments in Nigeria since the 1940s. Nowadays, the reform of public administration can be considered as a stable and autonomous public policy and object of a distinct stream of study or research. Uncertainty increases the risk of failure of an organisation's response and makes it difficult to compute the costs and probabilities associated with alternative decisions. To underpin the need, there is a growing shortage of public resources, which calls for a rethink on public service delivery, the ways organisations function, and the degree of efficiency of the whole system. The organisations are preoccupied with the lack of material and financial resources and with the need to ensure the availability of those resources (Adejuwon, 2012). Adamolekun (2005) opined that the challenges of public sector reform are accompanied with pressure from citizens, as regarding the quality of services provided, in conjunction with the widespread perception of inefficiency and backwardness of the public sector as a whole.

Several empirical studies have shown the effects, expected or not, of the public management reforms. In many cases the reforms have produced unintended consequences that had a negative impact on maintenance of what is basic by government and the public sector and also in many cases, changes to regulations, structures, and processes have not led to the expected results. Ihietan (2013) pointed out that public administrations have often imported tools and ideas for reform from the private sector (for example performance-related pay) while failing to bear in mind the national context or to consider the limits and weaknesses of those tools. Many countries continue to struggle to achieve the fundamental changes needed to respond to the unexpected effect of modernizations and new initiatives; such paradoxes seem to be a feature of consequences of action particularly in domains of strong beliefs and ambiguous experiences.

In a crisis situation, government needs to modernise the public sector and to focus on the relevance of public value so that people can explore and appreciate the current status of government reform. After almost four decades of reform in Nigeria, the role of the public sector has changed significantly in the fourth civilian dispensation. The expectations



for government action have not decreased, but in fact have increased in the 4th civil rule. Meanwhile, the nature of public policy problems or challenges faced by governments is still undergoing profound change. There is a growing need to understand the dynamic of the public sector in general; the modernisation of governments requires an understanding of the nature and dynamics of public administrations as a whole and how they work within the global society. The Obasanjo administration's Bureau for Public Service Reforms (BPSR), a reform process which demonstrates that public management reforms are a priority and that they offer an important opportunity for rethinking how to make changes effective and how to manage reforms. Agboola (2016) notes that the priority of public sector reforms is also emphasized in the BPSR reforms.

The four imperatives for public sector reforms are as follows:

1. *Enhancing transparency through initiatives of service compact*; that is, it enhances transparency which is regarded as a highly prized value that is generally discussed as a tool for increasing government accountability. Also, it serves as a desirable principle for reducing corruption in the public sector, and as a means for putting pressure on government performance.
2. *Improving leadership status* to meet the need for strengthening leadership and enhancing managerial responsibility in order to create a qualified cohort of civil servants capable of ensuring coherence, coordination and continuity within the public sector. Reforms relating to leadership emphasize several concepts, such as the definition of the key skills of future leaders and development of human resources departments for the recruitment of public leaders.
3. *Measuring performance* based on effective use of information on performance remains one of the most debated issues in the public sector today. The public sector in Nigeria is facing unprecedented pressure to improve the quality of their services while at the same time lowering their costs. The importance of strengthening the systems used to measure and assess performance has plainly increased in recent years.
4. *Combating corruption* remains a challenge for poorly operating states, such as Nigeria. Corrupt public servants have siphoned a great deal of the nation's wealth, leaving little for the country's poorest citizens. Reforming public institutions and government policies is necessary but poverty-alleviation measures need to be put in place to deal with the current high level of poverty. Policy-makers can arrive at plausible solutions only after

understanding corruption's effect on the quest for efficient and equitable management of the country's economic resources.

### **Innovation and Public Service Delivery**

Innovation in the public sector is a powerful engine and a key instrument for the reform and revitalization of both fully state-owned bodies and quasi-governmental organisations and agencies (Eran, Aviv, Nitza & Ayalla, 2008). Innovation has become the engine of growth, and the gateway to economic transformation and poverty reduction. Innovation is the driving force behind modern economic growth. It deals with governance, political issues and other human problems which are very difficult to solve (Okibo & Shikanda, 2013). Innovation has the potential of opening new doors, reformulating old problems, breaking policy deadlocks, bringing new actors together and formulating and implementing new ideas (Sorensen & Torfing, 2012).

Public sector innovation is about new ideas that work at creating public value (Mulgan, 2007). Innovation in the public sector does not always result in new public services but may be linked to institutional renewal, new forms of governance, process innovation, digitization and organisational improvements (Cunningham & Karakasidou, 2009). As observed by Sorensen & Torfing (2012), innovation has the potential of opening new doors, reformulating old problems, breaking policy deadlocks, bringing new actors together and formulating and implementing new ideas. No wonder, Awosika (2015) remarked that innovation is at the heart of the public server's efforts to improve performance and productivity and develop new capabilities, business, and markets, and also contribute to enhancing the standard of living as well as creating new opportunities.

Innovation in the public sector has become an important domain in response to a substantial criticism of governments due to their inability to produce high-quality public services, or develop efficient and effective ways of achieving desired social outcomes. Unlike the private sector, where innovation is at the base of the competitive advantage of firms and represents a necessary condition for survival and longer-term sustainability, governments do not face the same pressure to innovate. Still, they have to meet demands for improved performance and societal impacts (Awosika, 2015). Innovation can contribute to improve the public services quality and effectiveness as well as to enhance government capacity in solving problems. In the views of Hargadon & Sutton (2000), innovation is considered important to public sector organisations because of its role in maintaining competitiveness in a globalised economy;

enhancing the organisation's ability to adapt to changing technological, social, economic, and political environments; reducing costs and increasing productivity, thereby improving profits and strengthening the organisation; and inculcating an organisational culture of creativity. It is relevant to public sector management because it seeks to attract high-quality creative staff, thereby breathing new life into slowing or stagnant markets or other operational areas; innovation could also facilitate entry into new markets.

### **Assessment of Innovative Ideas in the Nigerian Public Service**

Recent innovations in the area of public service delivery has seen a shift from the traditional model of government being the sole provider to a more pragmatic approach such as public-private partnerships and alternative service delivery (Olumide, 2015). In the area of public service delivery, the old approach was to have public agencies serve as the sole producer and provider. However, this practice has given way to innovative ideas such as Public-Private-Partnership (PPP), outsourcing, performance measurement and so much more (Olumide, 2015). Regarding improving performance through innovations in the Nigeria civil service, the Federal Civil Service Commission introduced innovation in Appointments, Promotion, and Discipline. Also, through innovation in the public service, governments have been adopting Alternative Service Delivery (ASD) like agencification, concessions, public-private partnership, etc., in delivery services to the people. Alternative Service Delivery is a creative and unique procedure that involves changes in the style of existing public sector organisations or the design of new forms of organisation and is sometimes referred to as “restructuring” and “organisational innovation.” The development of ASD arrangements as observed by Olumide (2015) has been closely linked with the advent of New Public Management (NPM) movement which advocates for innovative approaches to service delivery.

Similarly, another potential form of achieving higher efficiency is to utilize the advantages of the private sector entities to develop alternative service delivery arrangements. This was the situation in Nigeria when the government could no longer finance most capital projects, and even public corporations were performing at a loss. The general trend was to privatize these entities, thereby ending their being managed by the public service. However, issues bothering on equity and access had to be resolved to guide against the exclusion of certain strata of the society like the lower-class. Therefore, beyond the privatization process, other mechanisms were sought in order to effectively deliver public goods and services (Olumide, 2015).

The introduction of e-government is another major innovation in Nigeria. This refers to the use of information technology application to perform government functions with maximum efficiency and at minimum cost. It enables governments to deliver information and, in some cases, services to citizens, businesses, and government agencies. The goals of e-government are: better service delivery to citizens, improved services for business, transparency and empowerment of the citizens through information and efficient government purchasing.

Notable benefits of the implementation of innovation in the Nigerian public service include:

- the introduction of a national health insurance scheme and public expenditure management;
- procurement reform and the passage of a Fiscal Responsibility Act to ensure prudent management of resources;
- promoting the effectiveness of the civil service through organisational restructuring;
- waste curtailment through monetization of fringe benefits;
- establishment of service charters and institutionalization of compliance enforcement; and
- the setting up of the Bureau of Public Sector Reforms (BPSR) as the institutional framework for sustaining the reform (Agagu 2008; Adegoroye 2006; Babura, 2003).

## **METHODOLOGY**

This paper's methodological approach is based on qualitative analysis of the discussed concepts; the paper explored the necessity of innovation in public sector quality services and why there is need for a paradigm shift from the traditional bureaucratic system of administration to a new public management system. This paper reviewed related literature, textbooks, and a range of relevant data from previous studies on new public management role in public service delivery in Nigeria Public Service. The paper adopted analytical research in arriving at findings.

## **FINDINGS**

The findings of the paper revealed that the adoption of New Public Management (NPM) has improved public service in the delivery of social service to the citizens. Providing timely and well-argued policy advice to public decision-makers is generally regarded as a core responsibility of the public service. It also revealed that NPM is viewed as a more efficient means of attaining the same product or service; however, within the NPM

framework, citizens are viewed as customers and public servants or administrators hold the title of public managers. NPM also reduced corruption in the public service through the implementation of e-government and SERVICOM initiatives to the citizens. The findings also revealed that NPM emphasized accountability and transparency as a pivot of good governance. This is strengthened by access to reliable and accurate information on activities in the realm of public service, especially on fiscal and financial matters and macroeconomics framework. It also eliminates monopolistic tendencies and allows market forces to determine prices of goods and services.

## **CONCLUSION**

The major driving force behind adoption of New Public Management was the fact that the socio-economic situation of Nigeria was on the precipice. NPM model involves a major realignment of state relations with the market, and governance programmes entail a deliberate redirection of aid policies to promote a particular model of the state-society relations. Good governance and NPM are regarded as mutually supportive reforms, with greater political and social accountability contributing to the realization of more efficient government. The new public management favours loosening the structures of the traditional model to allow for more creativity and flexibility in order to achieve new efficiencies and better customer service. It would give lower level managers more flexibility to use their own information and judgment to make decisions (that is, let good managers manage). It would encourage managers to take risks and be more entrepreneurial, and it would achieve accountability by measuring outputs rather than by monitoring processes.

The paper, however, discovered that public service delivery in Nigeria has remained largely ineffective due to ineffective implementation of innovative ideas. Innovative ideas were designed to make the public service delivery efficient. However, the good intentions of innovation have been largely unrealized as the provision of services is still ineffective and inefficient as a result of excessive adherence to rules and red tape in the Nigerian public service. The paper concluded that, in spite of this, NPM reforms had led to the emergence of a truly professionalised Nigerian public service in the fourth democratic governance. The new public management approaches can be useful to governments and ought to be seriously considered. It should, however, be noted that NPM is not a blanket solution to all of the challenges of public administration in modern governments.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

There is an urgent need for developing countries, such as Nigeria, to adopt public service performance management programmes such as the new public management to enhance efficiency and good governance, engender economic growth, sustainable development and competent public service that delivers effective social services to the citizens. The study recommends as follows:

- Organisational restructuring and renewal, including strengthening of capacity to enable the public service be more responsive to the needs and preferences of citizens.
- Strengthening of linkages between government agencies, including strengthening the capacity of line departments, to enable them interact with one another and with central agencies.
- Addressing management problems related to employee performance management, wage and non-wage incentives, irrational job classification systems and ineffective payroll and personnel systems.
- Public sector organisations in Nigeria should have well-shared vision and mission rather than being organized through the hierarchy and established procedures.
- The government should set up innovation implementation committees that will work out modalities for effective implementation of innovative ideas, with performance evaluation units established to evaluate, based on set targets, the level of success and failure in service delivery.
- Government should also set up feedback mechanism to report implementation effectiveness or flaws.
- For innovation to thrive in Nigeria there is need for continuous training of the public servants, and development-oriented training of technocrats and updating of their technical expertise remains paramount.
- Government should provide the necessary infrastructure that will aid the successful implementation of innovation in Nigeria's public service.
- Public Private Partnership should be encouraged by the government to increase efficiency in the area of public service delivery. This will reduce impediments associated with bureaucracy to the barest minimum.
- Bureaucratic control of critical service-delivery processes should

be greatly reduced in order to create conducive environment that allows public service providers to generate and implement innovation within their organisations.

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