Managing Change: Transition from the Traditional Bureaucratic Practices to E-Government

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Abstract: In line with international best practice and public demand for a more efficient and responsive public service, Nigeria - like many other countries - gradually transitioned from the traditional bureaucratic practices to the use of Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) - widely known as Electronic - government (E-government). This system of governance demonstrates high level of effectiveness and efficiency in public service dispensation and the general conduct of government businesses in addition to promoting transparency and accountability in government. The adoption of egovernment in Nigeria's public service was hinged on certain intended benefits. However, these benefits oftentimes do not occur. A large body of knowledge on the adoption of ICTs in Nigeria's public service exists, spanning from its prospects, to its implementation and challenges. However, the discourse has inadvertently neglected an important aspect which is the transition process. The transition from traditional bureaucratic practices to e- government, though desirable, can lead to many unintended outcomes if the "people side", that is the human component of the public service are not taken into consideration in the transition process. The proper implementation of a transitional programme is therefore of utmost importance, if the intended outcomes of technology adoption are to be fully realized. This paper examines the implementation of e- government in Nigeria with a view on how to involve the public servants and the citizenry in general. The methodology adopted for this paper is qualitative as data from secondary sources were subject to content analysis.

Keywords: E- government; Change management; Bureaucracy

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Introduction

In line with international best practice and public demand for a more efficient and responsive public service, Nigeria — like many other countries — gradually transitioned from the use of traditional bureaucratic practices to the use of Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) — widely known as Electronic — government (E-government). This system of governance, it is believed, demonstrates high level of effectiveness and efficiency in public service dispensation and the general conduct of government businesses in addition to promoting transparency and accountability in government. However, implementing a change programme, like this, in any organization is bound to encounter challenges, and may ultimately face the risk of failure, if it does not integrate the human component of organizations. This is particularly true of developing countries where over the years, records have shown that the high degree of failure of public sector reforms, among other factors, is due to the resistance from the people who are meant to implement the change (Gilley et al., 2009 cited in Ake, 2015).

This has also been observed in the implementation of e-government projects in developing countries, like Nigeria. Most implementations of e-government projects in developing countries are said to fail. Specifically, 35% of e-government projects fail totally, that is, they were not implemented, or were abandoned soon after implementation. Another 50% are considered to be partial failures, that is, the expected goals were not attained and/or there were unintended outcomes (Heeks, 2003 cited in Dada, 2006). These implementation failures are not unconnected with the gap that exists between the intent and reality of implementing e-government projects in developing countries. One of such gaps is the hard – soft gap which lays bare the difference between the actual technology (hard) and the reality of the social context that is, the people, culture etc. in which the system operates (soft) (Heeks, 2003). As Hornstein (2008), argues it is not the adoption of technology itself that guarantees organisational success, but the ability of such organizations to elevate the relevance of the human system within such organizations by integrating them into the organisational change management process.

The inability of most governments to integrate the human component in the implementation of e-government projects is the bane of implementing such projects in developing countries, including Nigeria. This paper therefore seeks to examine the challenges of the transition from traditional bureaucratic practices to the implementation of e-government in Nigeria as well as suggest solutions, in order to reduce its rate of failure. The study is divided into six sections. Following the

introductory section, is the examination of the nature of the traditional public administrative system, followed by sections on the nature of e-government, the nature and challenges of the transition, managing the transition, and finally, the conclusion in that order. This study is qualitative in orientation and as such, it relies on secondary sources of data. The analysis of the data will essentially be descriptive.

The Nature of Traditional Public Administrative Systems

The public administrative system is designed essentially to render public services to the citizens. These services cut across the social, economic and political spheres of society. In order to provide these services, the system develops certain processes and structures that would facilitate the attainment of this objective. These processes and structures are rooted in the works of Max Weber, Fredrick Taylor, Henri Fayol etc. This group of scholars is referred to as the classical theorist of public administration. Their theory to a large extent has shaped the nature of the public administrative system of both the developed and developing countries.

Weber for instance, articulated the principles of bureaucracy which placed emphasis on the control of subordinate officials by superior officials in what could be described as a monocratic hierarchy. Pfiffner (2004) listed other characteristics of the Weberian ideal type bureaucracy as:

a system of control in which policy is set at the top and carried out through a series of offices, with each manager and worker reporting to one superior and held to account by that person. The bureaucratic system is based on a set of rules and regulations flowing from public law: the system of control is rational and legal. The role of the bureaucrat is strictly subordinate to the political superior.

It is upon these principles that the Nigerian public administrative system is built.

The principles espoused by Weber on how the bureaucracy should operate shows a rigid and structurally hierarchical system. The process of government is based on adherence to rules and procedures. These rules and procedures make it difficult for public officials to be innovative in dealing with contemporary issues of citizens. For instance, due to the manual process of rendering public service, citizens have to physically visit ministries in order to receive them. This kind of process creates so many clearance points for citizens in their attempt to get government services. Similarly, information is not easily accessible as subordinate officials need the approval of their superiors before they can release such information. This manual

process accounts for the delays citizens experience when accessing government services. Similarly, their rigid attachment to procedures for meeting citizens' demands makes it difficult to address the peculiarities of these demands. The procedures indicate the steps to follow thereby creating so many clearance points which is referred to as red-tape. This according to Okotoni (2001) "hinders quick action and effective communication among public bureaucracies". Processing of a file takes longer time than required as emphasis is on adherence to procedures not prompt satisfaction of citizens' request. Similarly, Maduabum (2014) citing a report of a federal government's study team on "structure, staffing and operations" observed the tendency for senior officials to seek clearance from top echelons of the service before taking a decision. This, the team observed leads to time-wasting and kills the initiative of intermediate officers.

The traditional public administrative system based on the principles propounded by Weber has been criticized by several scholars. This criticism bother on the assumptions underlining Weber's principles and the result it has generated over the years. Olatunji (2013) summarizes some of this criticism as follows:

- That bureaucracy involves a danger of the means becoming the end or goal as procedures become ritualised and the official strives to apply rules to every detail of the job. Because bureaucracies are usually characterised by red tape, formalism, rigid rules, precision and reliability, Merton (1968) argued behaviour becomes stereotyped in ways that may not be appropriate to the specific set of circumstances currently confronting the bureaucrat. The results include comformity, timidity and conservatism that may not serve the needs of the organisation for adaptation and goal achievement (Sofer, 1973).
- Because office holding is based on rights and duties in an atmosphere where communication is not emphasized; insensitivity to the clientele may result. This may prove very costly in the case of public bureaucracies serving sensitive, educated, sophisticated and a more demanding clientele as of modern society.
- Standardization makes change difficult when circumstances change. This has been the bane of development in the new and developing states of the third world, Africa inclusive.
- By excessive reliance on rules and orders, bureaucracy breeds conservatism, timidity and under-utilizes human potential in the organization.

This criticism among other things has been the basis for public sector reforms in developed and developing countries. Citizens were feeling a sense of alienation from the system meant to serve them and demanded a change in the structure and processes of the public sector. Apart from the inherent flaws noticed in Weber's ideal type bureaucracy, the Nigerian public administrative system is plague with certain distortions of the concept of bureaucracy. One of such distortions is the pervasiveness of corruption. Official government statements also lend credence to this. In 2003, President Olusegun Obasanjo noted that corruption together with inefficiency, has affected the quality of public service delivery, as well as impeding effective policy implementation in Nigeria (UNCT-CCA, 2012).

The adherence to rules and procedures as advocated by Weber have since been abandoned by public officials across government's ministries and agencies in Nigeria and have resorted to the indiscriminate award of contracts without following due process. Such cases of diversion of public funds for personal purposes abound at all levels of government. The culmination of the inherent flaws of Weber's ideal type bureaucracy and the corrupt nature of the public administrative system in Nigeria served as the basis for the introduction of E-government into the processes of government in the country.

Electronic Government: Nature and Implementation in Nigeria

Electronic government is described as the use of ICTs to transform government by making it more accessible, effective, and accountable to its citizenry (InfoDev, 2004 cited in Ifinedo, 2006). It has also been described as the electronic delivery of services by the government to the citizens and other stakeholders, such as other levels of government and their agencies, government employees and the private sector. Succinctly, it is the use of information technology in the public sector (Heeks, 2006).

The term "Electronic Government" (e-government) was first used during the 1993 United States National Performance Review, and since then the term has evolved (Heeks, 2007). Its emergence is not unconnected with the invention of the internet by the Department of Defense in the United States of America. The introduction of the internet is said to have brought a number of changes in the way things are done around the world, both in the private and public sectors. It was the successes recorded in the implementation of electronic commerce (e-commerce), another by-product of the internet, which inspired and motivated governments to seek better delivery of 30

public services through the use of the internet. The ever increasing expectation of the citizens who had experienced speed, dispatch and convenience of transaction in the private sector and who also desired the same of their governments, hastened governments to adopt the e-government for easier, faster and a more convenient means of service delivery and general interaction between the government and citizens as well as among governments' MDAs. (Kariuki & Kiragu, 2011).

Barthwal (2003) discusses the concept as a generic one, encompassing; etools. participation e-decision making, e-consultation. e-communication strengthening two-way channels, e-democracy (processes and structures that encompass all forms of electronic communication between the electorate and the elected). E-government efforts are mainly facilitated by ICTs, and these consist of two parts: devices and systems, which are used to access, store, communicate, manipulate and share information. ICT devices are instruments such as cellular phones, televisions, and computers that are used by individuals to communicate over a network or system. On the other hand, ICT systems are interconnected devices and associated infrastructure such as networks used to facilitate communication and information sharing (Melody, Mansell & Richards, 1986 cited in Gaskins, 2013). Egovernment aims at making the interaction between government and citizens (G2C), government and business enterprises (G2B), government and employees (G2E) and inter-agency relationships (G2G) more friendly, convenient, transparent, and inexpensive (Bose, 2004 cited in Ifinedo, 2006).

Kariuki and Kiragu (2011) also identified three domains of e-government namely; electronic administration (e- administration), electronic services (e-services) and electronic partnership (e-partnership). E-administration aims at delivering administrative services at lower cost. However, this is subject to the availability of a secure, reliable and low-cost data communication infrastructure. The use of intranet within public organizations can help to improve communications as public servants can send and receive electronic mails. This and other forms of e-administration increase efficiency by way of saving time and cost of processing certain information. E-services including online application for services such as new passports or renewal, registration for examinations, vehicle licensing as well as distance education, aims at improving accessibility at an affordable cost and are delivered from a government's portal. E-partnerships enable intra and inter governmental organizations to interact as well as collaborate in service provision. Of the three domains highlighted, this is said to be the least developed.

The benefits that can accrue to the public sector through the implementation of e-government strategies have been highlighted by scholars and public sector practitioners alike. Gilbert, Balestrini, and Littleboy (2004), in their study, and AlFawwaz (2011) enumerate such from citizens' perspective to include: increased government accountability to citizens, more access to information for the public, more cost effective and efficient government, avoidance of personal interaction, convenience. Dada (2006), lists additional benefits including; less corruption, increased transparency, revenue growth. For Barthwal (2003) improved interactions with business and industry, citizen empowerment through access to information, strengthening people's voice, fostering partnership and collaboration between different levels of government (local, state and central), breaking bureaucratic barriers, are the core benefits of adopting e-government. However, according to Lio, Liu and Ou (2011), most of the enumerated benefits only exist theoretically, and are yet to be fully realized.

In Nigeria, E- government was officially introduced with the adoption of the National Information Technology policy in March 2001, with the objectives, among other things, to: improve accessibility to public administration for all citizens, bringing transparency to government processes, bringing the government to the doorsteps of people by creating virtual forum and facilities to strengthen accessibility to government information and facilitating interaction between the governed and government leading to transparency, accountability and the strengthening of democracy. And also by utilizing IT opportunities to restructure government, citizens and business interfaces for better governance, improved trade and commerce and administrative effectiveness (Nigeria National Policy for Information Technology, 2001).

To implement the objectives of this policy with utmost impact, the Government established a National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA) by an Act of the National Assembly in 2007 under the supervision and coordination of the Federal Ministry of Science and Technology. By implication, the NITDA is directly responsible for the implementation of the e-government initiatives in Nigeria. This it does using the National e-government Strategy Limited (NeGSt), a public-private partnership project (NITDA, 2001). One of the flagship projects of government is the Government Service Portal (GSP). It provides a single window technology access for citizens and other stakeholders to government services being provided by various Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs). The first phase of the GSP included the automation of ten government processes, from five Federal

Government Ministries, namely; the Federal Ministries of Health, Agriculture, Industry, Trade and Investment, Education and Communication Technology (Aginam, 2014). Several other government agencies and institutions have also adopted e-government strategies, including; tertiary educational institutions, examination agencies and other key governmental institutions like the Nigerian Immigration Service, in the form of information dissemination, form processing and carrying out financial transactions online, to enhance efficiency in their internal organization.

The Nature and Challenges of the Transition

As earlier established the traditional public administrative practices are time-tested and proven means of governments delivering services to their citizens. However, these practices have become unresponsive to and incapable of delivering the needed services to their citizens (Olowu, 1999, UNCT-CCA, 2012, Omotoso, 2014). As Karwal (2007) rightly observes, the traditional governmental structures and systems are no longer adequate and suitable to meet the demands of rising citizen aspirations and challenges of the contemporary complex and globalised economies. Studies have shown that governments around the world are leveraging on the ICTs to effectively dispense services and make the general conduct of government businesses more efficient (Dunleavy, Margetts, Bastow & Tinkler, 2005; Dada, 2006; Akesson, Skalen & Edvardsson, 2008; Karwal, 2012; Ifinedo, 2006).

Thus, the transition from traditional bureaucratic practices to e-government can best be described as the movement:

From information asymmetry to information diffusion - Asymmetry of information that is, the disproportional level of information, particularly of what it costs to deliver public services to the citizens. This usually exists between the government and the public servants on one hand, and the public servants and the citizens, on the other, and has formed the basis of aggravated corruption in the public service (Alabi & Fashagba, 2010). Indeed the privileged access the public servants have to information is unduly used to divert benefits in their own direction at the expense of the citizens. Information is hoarded under the guise of being official secrets. However, under the e-government regime, there is a transition to information diffusion, whereby information is properly processed and easily access by citizens. This in turn promotes transparency by making information freely available to all on government portals.

From face-to-face interaction to virtual meetings – Whereas under the traditional bureaucratic regime, citizens and government officials must be in the physical presence of each other, in the confines of the government buildings, before any interaction can take place. However, with the introduction of e-government, meetings can now be held virtually as parties can now connect over a network. This has also further bridged the gap between the government and the citizens, as interactions have now become seamless. Citizens can now access government officials through their devices such as mobile phone and computers.

From bureaucratic delays to speedy processing of information and delivery of services – With the implementation of e-government, it is expected that delays associated with the old regime caused by red-tapism and the general attitude of government officials to work can be reduced, because an e-government driven process is expected to be without any form of delay.

As it has been previously established in this work, the greatest challenge in this transition is the inadvertent neglect of the people, particularly those who will be affected by the implementation of the new project, and are also threatened by these innovations. This is because they lack sufficient information about the scope of the change, the training implications, and the potential impact on role changes. This information vacuum is often filled with rumors instead of integrating and engaging all employees with the technology and business process improvement activities (Hornstein, 2008).

In their study on the challenges to the successful implementation of e-Government initiatives in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), Nkohkwo and Islam (2013) categorized the challenges under the acronym IF-POSH, which stands for Infrastructural, financial, political, organisational, socio-economic and human. They found out that the most important themes found under the Organizational aspect were leadership and change management. This implies that strong, effective and purposeful leadership is important in the transition process, yet it is lacking in most SSA countries. They also found the dearth of organizational skills and effective communication which is necessary in order to maintain the values, visions and values of all stakeholders in an e-government initiative. This poses a problem for countries in SSA whose governments are corrupt and might want to use ICTs for their own ends. This is true especially considering that government agencies in developing countries might view this as a threat to their viability and power, making them reluctant to promote the true objectives of e-government.

As change is inevitable in organizations, so also is resistance to change, particularly in the public sector (Madinda, 2014). The sources of resistance may comprise such factors as the fear of the unknown, which results from the inability of implementers to adequately inform the employees of the organisational expectations from such a move. This vacuum creates fear in individuals who over the years have been stabilized within the system. Thus the proposed change could be viewed as a way of disrupting their normal life hence the resistance. There are also economic and social factors such as the fear that the change may affect their remuneration as it will render them redundant in their current comfort zones. Also the need to protect the social status and image they have built over the years may necessitate resistance from the employees. Also the inability to adjust to a new way of doing things due to the fact that a work habit has been formed on the job over the years, this also leads to resistance (Madinda, 2014).

Managing the Transition

The transition from a manually driven public administrative system to one based on ICTs comes with its own challenges as discussed above. These challenges could however be overcome if the transition process is properly managed. For instance, Maduabum (2014) observed that innovative ideas are often resisted by superior officers. They perceive such ideas as inimical to their interest in the public service. They tend to view such changes in terms of job loss and the loss of certain benefits they receive from the existing system. Consequently, they tend to frustrate or not support such innovative ideas. This attitude exhibited by superior officers in government ministries are the likely responses to the introduction of new organizational procedures. The more reason initiators of these initiatives should prepare in advance measures that will address resistance to change by the human component within the public service.

The lack of local ownership of most public sector reforms was identified as part of the reason why these reforms fail to reach their logical conclusion. The top echelons of the public service should be seen as the key change agents, without their support and commitment to the E-government initiative, there is a high possibility of failure. Their role as leaders in managing change cannot be underestimated and is seen as the major factor to change success (Noer, 1997). Similarly, Higgs and Rowland (2005) cited in Sidra et al (2012) stated that "It is the leadership's behavior that makes the change situations more effective". Thus, the successful implementation of

E-government for effective service delivery lies in the leadership of the public service. The leadership is responsible for such things as; setting out the plan, outlining the vision and purpose of E-government programme, develop a strategic of implementation and ensure that middle and lower level officials buy-in-to the programme. In other words, the leadership should be the main driver of the Egovernment programme as they understand the environment of the public service. Thus, overlooking its significance in the implementation of E-government programme could short-circuit the process. Consequently, government should put in place a forum to engage the top officials of the public service on the benefits of Egovernment and solicit their support in the implementation of the programme. Their inputs from the discussions held should form the part of the implementation process. Once their support for the programme is established, they should serve as the channel for galvanizing the commitment of the middle and lower level officials to the new process of delivering public service. Similarly, the commitment and support of these leaders should be sustained throughout the implementation process. At no point should they feel sidelined in the process. On the contrary, concrete efforts should be made to ensure their engagement at every stage of the implementation process.

Terrell Katie (2015) noted that "In operational change initiatives, the goal of Organizational change Management is to ensure that users will embrace the change, understand why the new system was put into place and know how to work in the new system". Thus, another key variable that should herald the introduction of a new process or initiative is for the key stakeholders to embrace the new system. The willingness to accept E-government initiatives must be present before E-government measures are introduced. The interest of those saddled with the responsibility of operating these processes must be engendered. They must see the overall picture of the introduction of E-government has been in their interest. Anything short of this could stymie the implementation process. The individual government official must be reoriented on the benefits of E-government such that there are no misconceptions of the programme. This involves effective communication of the reasons for change and benefits of the change. According to a Queensland government publication, it noted that "it is important that everyone in the organization and those interacting with the organization, both internal and external stakeholders are kept informed and provided with messages and information that will allow them to feel engaged, thus paving way for involvement and adoption".

Effective communication is another vital component of managing the transition from manual processes to E-government platform. Prosci (2007) stated that "Poor change

communication is a common cause of complaint and change research emphasizes that change can be derailed if the communication plan is ineffective". Thus, the content and channel of communicating with the officials saddled with operating the E-government should be properly examine. This is with a view to understand likely areas that misconception could arise and the more effective medium of communicating with these officials. This is so important and should be done at the early stage of the implementation of the E-government programme. Vital information should be disseminated at the appropriate time and if possible repeated to ensure full assimilation of the information. Similarly, the communication should be two-way channel so as to get a response on the information given.

The last stage which by no means should the end of the change process is consolidation of the new initiative. This is what Lewin (1951) refers to as the refreezing stage. According to Kritsonis (2005, p. 2) "The purpose of refreezing is to stabilize the new equilibrium resulting from the change by balancing both the driving and restraining forces". This implies that the major impetus for the introduction of E-government should be balanced with resistance from public sector officials who have become comfortable with the old method of service delivery. This is necessary in order to ensure continuity of the programme. The officials must see the E-government platform as the new way of doing things such that the old system becomes unattractive. This means government must institutionalize the process of E-government by ensuring that these officials interact with the system on a daily basis and has form a major part of government operations. Once this is achieved, the officials would embrace the new system and the old system will no longer be appealing to them, more so, when they begin to see the anticipated benefits of the new systems. The more reason initiators of E-government programme should clearly articulate from the beginning the benefits the new system has over the old system.

Conclusion

The traditional public administrative system had its merit of achieving efficiency and effectiveness in public service delivery at the initial stage of the development of the discipline. However, as the needs in society became more complex and the methods of meeting them became obsolete, there was the need to adopt new measures. One of the major criticisms of the traditional administrative system was the inability to adapt to change and the emphasis on following rules which do not allow for creativity and innovation.

It was against these criticisms that calls were made for the reform of the public sector in order to make it relevant meeting contemporary societal needs. One of the reforms carried out in the public sector was the introduction of E-government. This was meant to ease the transaction time between the citizen and government and also ensure prompt delivery of public service. This kind of innovation like every other form of reform carried out in the public sector was met with certain resistance as government officials were already fixated on the traditional method of public administration and perceive this new technique could make them lose their jobs. This perception was based on the way public sector reforms were carried out in the 1980s and 1990s as a key aspect was the downsizing or rightsizing of the public service. A lot of government officials were disengaged from the service and there was a constant psychological torment on those remaining as they were not sure of their jobs. Consequently, subsequent reforms were meant with resistance in form of sabotaging the implementation process by not following through the various stages of the action plan. Similarly, most of these reforms measures were mainly backed by International donors and do not have local ownership thereby creating a disconnection between the government officials and the new system.

The process of transiting from the traditional public administrative system to Egovernment is one that requires careful management in order to arrive at the intended goal of the initiative. This can only be achieved by inculcating the human component in the implementation process. Implementation of E-government should not be seem as a technical process that encompasses only training of public officials on how to use this system. On the contrary, it should involve measures that will make these officials buy-in-to the new system such that they not have the wrong perception of it. Sidra et al (2012) stated that "Every living creature is reluctant to change, whether it's a planned change or accidental change". Therefore it is pertinent to include in the transition process measures that will correct any misconception of the Egovernment programme among government officials. They should be made to appreciate the enormous benefits that E-government will offer them in the discharge of their duties. As Adedeji (2015) noted that "innovative ideas have the potential to transform the structure and processes of the public sector to make it more efficient and effective". E-government is an innovative idea that has enhanced the efficiency of the public sector in delivering public service such that citizens could access information and make request without physical contact with public officials. Likewise, public officials can deal with enquiries and request from citizens and provide relevant information on government programmes with ease through the E- government platform. However, all these benefits will be lost if the initiators of the E-government programme do not bring on board the public officials who will operate this system. To achieve this will require a careful assessment of the human component of any change programme to ascertain areas of resistance by public officials and how it can be corrected. Successful implementation of E-government depends on the ability of the initiators to align the orientation of the public officials from the traditional system of public administration to the new and better way encapsulated in E-government.

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