

E-Governance for Functional Bureaucratization in Nigeria: Benefits and Challenges

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ABSTRACT

This paper examined the challenges and potential benefits in e-governance for effective bureaucratization in Nigeria. The study through review of extant works in e-governance and bureaucracy assessed the concepts of bureaucracy, bureaucratization and e-governance. An instrumental case study research design was adopted for the study. Data for the study was collected through secondary sources, personal observations and interactions during conferences. Content analysis was utilized to analyze information generated. The paper, therefore found out that application of modern information and communication technologies stand to improve on public bureaucracy by infusing accountability, accessibility, and flexibility in public administration. These could be achieved through the use of close circuit cameras, computer applications and software as well as artificial intelligence in public offices. However, the challenges in tapping into this gold mine of technology in public administration in Nigeria ranges from inadequacy of skilled ICT personnels, corruption and bureaucratic resistance, poor/inconsistent policies and regulatory frameworks, inadequate public and digital awareness, inadequate ICT infrastructure and digital divide, among others. The study consequently recommended among others that government should provide modern ICT infrastructure, promote cybersecurity and theft consciousness and develop ICT policies in Nigeria.

Key words: E-governance, E-government, ICT, Bureaucracy, Public Administration.

INTRODUCTION

Every state and government the world over, aspires to promote the general happiness of its people and residents. Through various means, they strive to utilize their resources in most effective and efficient manner. A sure way of achieving effectiveness and efficiency in resource deployment is by instilling rationality in every aspect of public administration.

In order to achieve and instill rationality in public service, the concept of bureaucracy has been developed. Bureaucracy is seen as both an institution and a process or method. As an institution, it is identified with institutions and large-scale organisations in society (Dimock, 1960). It is a state of society in which institutions overshadow individuals and simple family relationships. It represents a complex or large organization. Hyneman (1960) stated that bureaucracy is big organization. According to the author, it is considered big enough to be a bureaucracy if one has to search for who is making its policies and procedures are written out. Or if you think it takes too long for one part to find out what another part proposes to do.

As a process or method, it is an approach or system followed to make and implement rational decision in complex organisations. However, according to Weber (1968), who gave the modern concept of bureaucracy, it is a universal social phenomenon, and the means of carrying “community action” into rationally ordered

“societal action”. Some of the key characteristics of the Weber’s Ideal Type bureaucracy include rules and regulation, hierarchy/specialization, impersonality, expertise, fixed salary/remuneration, separation of incumbent from office and security of tenure (Okoli, 2004). According to the author, Weber claimed that purely from a technical point of view, bureaucracy is capable of attaining the highest degree of rationality and effectiveness because of these features. It is also superior to any other type of organization (Sharma, Sadana & Kaur, 2012). This is because division of labour minimizes duplication of tasks and friction. Hierarchy facilitates central planning, coordination, control and discipline. Employment on the basis of qualifications makes for a higher level of knowledge and more competent work. Rules not only save effort by standardization but also eliminate need to find a new solution for every individual problem. They also spell calculability of results. Impersonality promotes objectivity and prevents irrational action, favouritism and discrimination. Political heads ensure non-rational commitment to rationality.

Though, Weber never claimed that all modern organisations possess all the characteristics identified. An organization not possessing several of those features is not a fully developed bureaucracy. The closer an organization comes to displaying these features, the more rational and effective it is likely to be (Okoli, 2004).

Bureaucratization therefore connotes conscious adoption of the salient features of bureaucracy either in building an institution or developing procedures for optimal performance. The process of bureaucratization, is the manifold, cumulative and more or less successful realization of these characteristics. It is a process of injecting rationality and efficiency into administrative activities (Bendix, 1968 in Okoli, 2004). In Nigeria like other new states of Africa, bureaucratization involved the imposition or super-imposition of the elements of Western bureaucratic norms on the existing traditional or primordial ties. In other words, it was a wholesale transfer of a carefully and deliberately mapped out scheduling system to areas where time conception was secular (Okoli, 2004).

Consequently, it was an expensive experiment in Talcott Parsons’ patterned variables. The bureaucratization experiment expected the traditional ties, values and norms to be devoured by the new ones. But unfortunately, “social structures’ types and attitudes are coins that do not readily melt. Once they are formed, they persist...” (Schumpeter, 1947: 12). In the ensuing conflict and struggle for dominance and survival between the polarities, the novel structures had little time to consolidate and crystalize. In comparison with the process of bureaucratization in the Western countries, that of Nigeria and indeed African emerging states was premature. It was premature in the sense that the abrupt switch over attempted an impossible task of establishing a permanent and clear-cut demarcation between traditional and modern orientations by not paying heed to the socio-cultural, politico-economic conditions, and the time constraints of colonial societies (Okoli, 2004).

Consequently, the traditional norms, values and institutions did not evolve a “modus vivendi”, an accommodation with the new institutions and their values. The personnel of these institutions did not find time to effect the change-over by absorbing the cultural shock. This negligence or premature bureaucratization resulted in abuse of bureaucracy. All the key features ended up producing negative consequences, which could be better referred to as “bureaupathology”, a disease of bureaucracy according to (Thompson, 1964). He further asserted that these dysfunctions are produced by “bureaupathic behaviours”. Hence, adherence to rules becomes transformed into an end-in-itself resulting in the process of displacement of goals by which an instrumental value becomes a terminal value. This develops into rigidity, inability to adjust to reality, formalism and even ritualism. It treats men as machines at the disposal of the organization and pegs to be plugged into the square holes of the bureaucratic structure.

Despite these criticisms, bureaucracy remains the best form of organization even in the foreseeable future. It is the most enduring form of organization (Perrow, 1972). He insists that the sins generally attributed to bureaucracy are either not sin at all or are consequences of the failure to bureaucratize sufficiently. As a

result, efforts should be geared towards reducing the abuse or misapplication of bureaucracy in our today's complex world as we can hardly do without it. Bureaucratic institutions are used as veritable tools in the administration to establish and implement public policies and programs aimed at serving the demands of the people (Abah & Nwokwu, 2019).

In this era of rapid developments in information and communication technology, e-governance could serve as tool for sufficiently reducing the abuses of bureaucracy to make public administration in Nigeria very functional. It is the application of information technology to the processes of government functioning with a view to bring about smart, moral or ethical, accountable, responsive and transparent governance (Egonmwan, 2018). E-governance is by the governed, for the governed and of the governed. Governments and large organisations are moving towards e-governance to improve convenience, reduce time, improve transparency in delivering services to businesses and citizens. Businesses and citizens expect high standards of services, instant access to information, efficient transactions and support, whenever and wherever they need it, but in a secure fashion.

Therefore, this paper is poised to answer the following questions. How can e-governance reduce the rigidity in public bureaucracies in Nigeria without undermining efficiency and rationality? What are the potential benefits in a reformed bureaucracy through e-governance practice, holding citizens as important as rules and regulations or even more? What are the militating factors to effective use of e-governance to address bureaucratic limitations in Nigeria?

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

E-governance

Just like other concepts in academic discourse, e-governance is devoid of a straight-jacket definitions. Authors' background, exposure, information available usually colour their perceptions and definitions. However, according to Abasilim and Edet (2015), e-governance is simply the use of ICTs in the operations of government businesses. To put it in another way, it is the shift from the traditional method of carrying out government activities, which is primarily hierarchical, linear, and one-way, to the use of the internet, which allows the public to seek information at their own leisure and without having to rely on the government. The key goals of e-governance, on the other hand, are to improve government operations (e-administration), connect citizens (e-citizens and e-services), and create external connections (e-society).

Furthermore, it involves the application of information technology to the processes of government functioning with a view of bringing smartness, morality/ethics, accountability, responsiveness and transparency in governance. The essence of e-governance is to reach the beneficiary and to ensure that the services intended to reach desired individual are delivered as intended. This call for auto response to support the essence of e-governance, whereby the government realizes the efficacy of its governance (Egonmwan, 2018).

Therefore, consequent upon the involvement of a variety of actors in e-governance, governance of ICTs as tools for transformation, becomes an absolute necessity, in terms of substantial increase in regulation and policy making capabilities, with all the experts and opinion shaping processes along the various social stakeholders of these concerns. Therefore, the prospective of e-governance is that of using the technologies that help governing as well as governing such technologies. This is because there is no wisdom computerizing all and everything, especially owing to limitation of resources in poor countries (Egonmwan, 2018). The need and requirements of users must be considered. In this process, archaic rules and procedures hampering efficiency and effectiveness must change and new ways of doing things evolved. Without correcting these systemic weaknesses and you computerize, you are computerizing and promoting greater inefficiency. Doing the wrong thing faster is no progress. There is also the information and system security

such as architecture, standards and technology to manage (Egonmwan, 2018). This explains the difference between e-governance and a mere e-government.

E-government

This largely involves utilizing e-mail, depicting electronic mail transfer; e-commerce, buying and selling electronically and or e-banking, implying electronic money payment and transfer system used by banks and other financial service providers (Abdullahi, 2012). E-government suggests basically transiting from paper and pen to digital. Ensuring that what was carried out manually is now done with the aid of computer technologies without necessarily governing the process itself.

Difference between e-government and e-governance

Even though there are few differences between e-government and e-governance, both reinforces the other. Some of these areas of differences include:

1. E-government is narrower while e-governance is wider. More actors are involved in e-governance.
2. E-government is a one-way communication protocol, but e-governance is a two-way communication protocol.
3. E-government is government/state centered but e-governance is people-centered.

Similarities between e-government and e-governance

1. Both use ICT
2. Both target faster and efficient service
3. Both improve convenience
4. Both improve transparency
5. Both allows free flow of information (reduced bureaucracy)
6. Both have similar benefits and challenges
7. Both are against traditional paper and physical based systems

BUREAUCRACY AND EFFECTIVE BUREAUCRATIZATION

Bureaucracy is defined originally from a French word, “bureau” meaning desk and it referred to the cloth covering the desk of the 18th Century French Monarchs. With time, it became necessary to identify it as a form of government. However, the modern use of the term has deviated significantly from this French derivation. From Weber to Galbraith, bureaucracy has been used by many scholars in reference to all large organisations (Obikeze & Anthony, 2004). Key elements of bureaucracy include hierarchy, framework of law or regulations, technical specialization, search for rationality and value system.

With such basic elements, bureaucracy is considered useful in implementing policies, framing legislation, influencing legislature, ensuring survival of and growth, among others. Bureaucracy and bureaucrats also perform key environmental and economic planning and management functions. These include balancing professional and ethical considerations, weighing competing interests and carrying routine work of government (Obikeze & Anthony, 2004).

Despite these important roles of bureaucracy which can hardly be neglected in virtually all forms of government and environments, it has been heavily criticized. These criticisms included:

1. Inability to provide for rapid and unplanned changes
2. Non-recognition of the limited intelligence of man

3. Non-recognition of personal values of man
4. Neglect of ecological differences and specifics
5. Over routinization and rigidity (red-tapism)

These challenges pose serious threats to bureaucracy, especially in developing country as Nigeria. These realities have made the practice of bureaucracy sluggish and drudgery. Hence, an idea which was intended to bring about precision, speed, effectiveness, efficiency and increased performance has rather attracted name calling for itself.

Effectiveness here refers to achieving objectives set without doing much damage. It involves simplifying the process, making it people centered, innovative without jeopardizing significantly core values. Therefore, effective bureaucratization means using modern technologies to break the limits and pathologies inherent in traditional bureaucracy. This includes maintaining an institution or process that seem to protect rules against the people whom the rules are meant to serve. As it is said, laws (rules) are made for man; not man for rules.

Effective bureaucratization is taken here to suggest protection of official or institutional secrets truly meant to serve the people well. Impartiality in the treatment meted out to the public without undue regard to ethnicity, religion and other primordial considerations. It equally entails cost efficiency and effectiveness and continuous change with complex worlds of technology to boost the confidence of the people in the government and her agencies.

Because of the short-coming of bureaucracy, scholars in public administration are articulating ways of salvaging the image of public organisations. The focus of this study was to examine how ICTs through e-governance could be used to improve the challenges of bureaucracy without polluting its ideals.

BENEFITS OF E-GOVERNANCE FOR EFFECTIVE BUREAUCRACY

Most of the key challenges of bureaucracy and bureaucratization in Nigeria can be reasonably reduced with relevant e-governance practices and procedures. In today's world of information and technology, providing for rapid and unplanned changes, limited intelligence of man, personal values of man, ecological differences and specifics and over routinization and rigidity might not be serious threats as before.

With Artificial Intelligence, knowledge has advanced. This increased knowledge translates to more possibilities. Impossibility is fastly diminishing. Both in public and private sectors, computers applications are improving planning and meeting challenges. Computer simulations are used to experiment with great precisions which makes comprehensive planning possible. Robots and robotics sciences have produced inventions that take more risk than human being with better results which when applied responsibly would quickly adjust to rapid changes previously unthinkable.

Internets and cybersecurity skills are on the increase and high demand. With good internet and networking, cameras and other security gadgets, corruption and manipulations by officials can be exposed and checked. Modern offices with close circuit cameras can hardly be dens of corruption as what happens is being monitored by a third party. It is the same with filing methods that makes work much easy and better. In summary, appropriate use of the internet makes gathering and dissimilation of information very effective (Oghuvbu, Gbervbie & Oni, 2022).

MAJOR ADMINISTRATIVE AND DEMOCRATIC IMPROVEMENTS OFFERED BY E-GOVERNANCE

E-governance offers administrative and democratic improvements in public administration. It provides

cheaper and more effective management and processing of information, a freer flow of information between departments, agencies and layers within government; more professional administrators, supported by standardised, electronically-embedded decision-making systems and ensures the routine provision of services according to impersonal rules, as opposed to clientelist arrangements (Quadri, Oruku & Okeke, 2018).

Similarly, it improves transparency, particularly in relation to the procurement of government services, provides opportunities to work in partnership with the private sector in modernising governmental processes and ensures a freer flow of information between government and citizens; the strengthening of intermediary democratic institutions, such as parliaments, local government, civil-society organisations (CSOs) and independent media. E-governance equally offers opportunities for citizens to participate more directly in policy development and promotes opportunities to combine traditional and modern methods of accountability (Quadri, Oruku & Okeke, 2018).

CHALLENGES OF E-GOVERNANCE FOR EFFECTIVE BUREAUCRATIZATION IN NIGERIA

Several challenges hamstrung the use of e-governance practices for effective bureaucratization in Nigeria. These include inadequacy of skilled ICT personnels, corruption and bureaucratic resistance, poor/inconsistent policies and regulatory frameworks, inadequate public and digital awareness, inadequate ICT infrastructure and digital divide, among others.

In Nigeria, only about 42% of citizens have access to the internet. This limited access is more pronounced in the rural areas where infrastructural development is short. Hence, many citizens are unable to participate in e-governance initiatives, undermining the inclusivity of such programs (National Bureau of Statistics, 2023). In the same manner, ICT infrastructure remains lacking. Frequent power outages, collapse of the national grid and inadequate broadband coverage remain recurrent in Nigeria. According to the Nigerian Communication Commission (2023), the broadband penetration stood at approximately 45%, which is insufficient for comprehensive nationwide e-governance. Many government websites and online services are often inaccessible or slow, reducing their usability and effectiveness.

Cybersecurity concerns are real in a country as Nigeria. Nigeria e-governance platforms are vulnerable to cyber-attacks, which can compromise sensitive data and undermine trust in digital government services. In 2022, the Nigeria government's website suffered a major cyber-attack that exposed personal data of thousands of citizens. This breach highlighted the inadequacies in the country's cybersecurity protocols and the need for more robust measures to protect such treats.

Furthermore, corruption and bureau-resistance are common among Nigerians. Efforts to digitalize records and governance processes are being met with stiff resistance from those who allegedly benefit from manual processes. In 2023, attempts to implement an e-land registry in Lagos State were stalled by bureaucratic pushback, citing various administrative and logistical issues as excuses (Directorate of Land Registry, 2023).

Inadequacy of skilled ICT personnels is yet another issue in e-governance use in Nigeria and beyond. The National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA, 2022) reported that there is a significant gap in the number of skilled ICT personnel required to meet the demands of e-governance projects. This shortage affects the quality and sustainability of e-governance initiatives. Similarly, public awareness and digital literacy issues hinder e-governance usefulness. A 2023 survey by the Nigerian Bureau of Statistics revealed that a large proportion of the population is unaware of available e-government services or lack of skills to use them effectively. This lack of awareness and skills prevent many citizens from benefitting from e-governance initiatives.

IMPROVING E-GOVERNANCE FOR EFFECTIVE BUREAUCRATIZATION IN NIGERIA

Addressing the challenges faced by e-governance in Nigeria requires a multifaceted approach involving strategic investments, policy reforms, capacity building, and public partnerships. These could include the followings;

Provision of modern ICT infrastructure: Information communication and technology operates through modern facilities in both hard and soft wares. Such facilities include power supply, data centres and cloud services as well as internet broadband. Application of technologies requires constant electricity for individual and corporates uses. So, government should invest in renewable energy as well as generation and distribution of electricity for available and affordable power supply. Government should also implement and update the National Broadband Plan to achieve widespread high-speed internet connectivity.

Cybersecurity and theft consciousness: Government should place priority on protection of sensitive public and personal data to secure the confidence of ICT users. There should be regular training public awareness programs for government employees and stakeholders on cybersecurity best practices.

Development of policy and other regulatory instruments: The available frameworks across levels of government in Nigeria need to be adequately harnessed and harmonized to enhance ICT development. E-governance policies should be regularly reviewed and updated to keep pace with advancements in technologies and modern needs.

Other measures that could be of immense help are making digital literacy compulsory for employment and advancement in public service, incentivizing digital adoption and bridging digital divide by expanding internet access and improving internet infrastructures.

METHODOLOGY

The research design adopted for the study was instrumental case study method. This design enabled the researchers through qualitative literature review on concepts of the study provide information for further understanding of e-governance, bureaucracy and public administration in the Nigeria context. Data for the study was collected through secondary sources, personal observations and interactions during conferences. Information obtained was analysed using content analysis technique.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that e-governance offers great opportunities for functional public administration despite remarkable challenges of it faces in Nigeria today. It promotes accountability, accessibility, and flexibility in public administration. It provides cheaper and more effective management and processing of information and a freer flow of information between departments, agencies and layers within government. The study also found the challenges it faces in Nigeria to include inadequacy of skilled ICT personnels, corruption and bureaucratic resistance, poor/inconsistent policies and regulatory frameworks, inadequate public and digital awareness, inadequate ICT infrastructure and digital divide, among others. Hence, the paper made suggestions such as strategic investments, policy reforms, capacity building, and public partnerships to enhance e-governance for functional administration in Nigeria.

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