Civil Servants in Nigeria: Servants or Masters? An Overview

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Abstract
A civil servant is basically one who works in and within the civil service. Civil service is a body of government employees who are recruited into government owned institutions to work. This group of people is non-political in their dealings but have their votes as their powers. It is a service planned and organised around government owned institutions. In Nigeria, the civil service administration is seen as government measures to organise its public employment in relation to the countries manpower requirements. The civil servants see to the day to day running of government activities. They do not just attend to only government business but also attend to individuals businesses and files that come to their tables. This paper is specifically set to examine the role of civil servants in Nigeria and how they attend to individuals who come to their various offices for one thing or the other, their attitude to work and to people who come to their office. Are they the servants or the masters? Are they Nietzsche's superman or are they really there to serve the generality of Nigeria? Are they participating in existence or do they just exist? The paper recommends that civil servants who work in various ministries, departments and agencies ought to receive regular training to help improve their attitude to work and enhance their productivity and loyalty to their calling as civil servants. The paper therefore, concludes that civil servants are the fulcrum of every government administration and should show more commitment in the discharge of their day to day responsibilities in Nigeria.

Introduction
The civil service in Nigeria today is a product of colonial machinery by the British to consolidate their administration of the colonies. According to Okoli and Onah (2010:73) “it first started as a tool of conquest and grew into a task force to pacify native areas and make treaties with chiefs and local rulers. They had the job of making coercive, hostile and competing tribes to live together in peace. Adebayo (1901) cited in Ikpe (2005:281) succinctly remarked that “the civil service has since changed in structure; it has grown beyond the dreams of its forerunners and founders. This is because the workforce of the country has swollen and subsequently their function has increased. He further stressed that
the civil service as a body is a major instrument used by government to manage development and bring about economic growth. The civil servants are the policy advisers, programme formulators, executors, agent of political communication and government continuity.

Hence, the civil service is the general term used to designate the civil administrative personnel of the public authorities. It is concerned with the measures adopted by governments to organize their public workers in relation to the country’s manpower needs. The civil servants that work and occupy these various workplaces constitute the focus of this work. How do they treat people who come to their tables on daily basis? This paper is driven by unsavoury incidences observed over time which shows the irresponsible, haughty and lukewarm attitude of civil servants in their places of work. Sometimes what is been witnessed is a situation where the one who was recruited to serve the public now sits as the master, Nietzsche's superman the master of moral and demand you come tomorrow for a job that could have been done that very day. This is attributable to the fact that these civil and public servants wield so much power to the extent that they can make or destroy one's reputation and future. This is in tandem with Sartre's discussion on interpersonal relations, where he observed that 'attitude of indifference' is 'a kind of blindness with respect to others', an attitude by which a person remains blind to others request and demand (Omoregbe, 1991).

Evolution of Civil Service in Nigeria

The evolution of civil/public service in Nigeria cannot be traced or discussed without taking a historical journey back to the colonial era and it administrative instrument. The public or civil service in Nigeria began as a British instrument and machinery for the consolidation and administration of its colonies. Okoli and Onah (2010) observed that it all began as a tool employed by the colonial masters to conquer the indigenous people. However, this further developed as a task force which was used to pacify native rulers and make treaties with native chiefs. In addition, they had the responsibility to coercively but peacefully bring together all the competing tribes and ensure that places where peace was disturbed due to tribal disputes were subdued and calmed. The background adduced above, suggest strongly that the civil service was militarized. This means that the workforce then were men who got military training. By 1900, the colonial office took over responsibility from the Royal Niger Company. Afterward, the office became responsible for administration of all British West Africa. The period 1900 to 1940 was one of administrative consolidation in British colonies in West Africa particularly Nigeria.

According to Nicolson (1969) the duty of filling all positions in the administrative grades rested with the colonial office. Local personnel were recruited to fill the junior posts in the clerical, semi-skilled and unskilled grade or cadre. The bedrock of the colonial service was the administrative officer at the district level who was saddled with the
responsibility of making peace and seeing to the welfare of his area. He co-ordinates and supervises the local functions of the police and the treasury department. However, it is important to note that the exclusion of Nigerians from senior responsible positions led to feelings of frustration with the result that they (Nigerian civil servants) were inclined to be intransigent on the least provocation and rigid on their concept of work.

Structure of the Colonial Administration in Nigeria

Okpata (2004) further observed that the structure of colonial administration in Nigeria, like any other British colony in West Africa was that of Crown Colony (model) system. This means that British officials in obedience to the dictate of her metropolitan powers established in her West African colonies, the Crown Colony type of government and administration in which there was direct and central administration by the British crown as the various protectorates were also administered based on the nature of administrative system (indirect rule).

Conclusively, the civil service in Nigeria in the colonial era was to implement the colonial polices to satisfy her interest on the colony which was initially dominated by Britons and a few educated natives. Adamolekun (1966) cited in Ikpe (2005) noted that until the establishment of one central and three regional civil services, in 1954, the civil servants in Nigeria belonged to a single administrative entity that was an integral part of colonial civil service, administered by the colonial office in the metropolitan capital.
London. Nevertheless, the Nigerian civil service has since changed in structure. It has grown and transformed beyond the dreams of its colonial forerunners.

**Various Reforms in Nigeria Civil Service**

Nigeria civil service has passed through several reforms in a bid to make it better. But for the purpose of this work we shall only outline the major reforms in the Nigerian civil service. Among the notable reforms were:

i) Justice Morgan Commission: 1963-64 (terms of reference were to review wages, salaries and conditions of service of junior employers in both public and private sectors);

ii) T. Elwood Commission – 1966 (terms of reference was grading posts in the public service);

iii) Simeon Adebo Commission – 1970-74 (terms of reference was, to review the salary structure of the civil service);

iv) Chief Jerome Udoji Commission – 1972-74 (terms of reference were organization, structure and management, recruitment and conditions of employment, staff development programmes regarding all posts, pension and review of salaries);

v) Professor Dotun Philips federal civil service review panel 1984 (1988 civil service reforms); and


**Civil Service Conceptualised**

At this point, we shall look into the various definition of civil service as formulated by different scholars. According to Oyediran et al (2005:111) civil service is defined as “the entire body or specialized parts of the executive arm of government whose primary responsibility is the implementation of the policies and programmes of the government in power”. He further argued that the employees of the government who carry out these functions which are the administrative and executive duties are referred to as civil servant. Oyediran's definition of civil service means that the civil servants are directly or indirectly linked to the executive arm of government, since they see to the implementation and execution of the policies and programmes of this arm of government. In addition, encyclopedia (Circa 1576) cited in Okoye (2007:23) defined civil service as the collective administrative personnel of government. Comparing the two related definitions given above, we can understand that civil service comprise of government personnel or employees in different government departments, agencies or ministries who are associated with serving the government for the benefits of the public or its institutions.

Furthermore, the Public Service Rules and Pension Act 2006 cited in Ajaegbu (2010: 3) defined civil service as “a body or organ which enjoys continuity of existence. Essentially, it covers ministries and extra ministerial offices”. Ajaegbu (2010: 5) defined
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civil service as “a complex organisation comprising permanent official appointed in a civil capacity to as the political executives in the conception, formulation, implementation, coordination and monitoring of governmental policies in the ministries and extra-ministerial departments, with which government functions and responsibilities are carried out”. Therefore, civil services in every country have the responsibility of seeing to the day to day running and implementation of government policies and programmes for the common good of all. In fact, government may have all the plans and visions but without the excellent and appropriate execution, it would all come to nothing. That is the essence of civil service and its administration. This is because; it is one thing to have good plans and visions, but quite another thing to see such plans strategically carried out (Udenta, 2017).

Who is a Civil Servant?
Simply put, civil servants are servant of the government and the people. They are responsible for planning, advising and implementing policies. They are seen or found in the various ministries of government headed by political heads called ministers or commissioners. Oyediran et al (2005) argues that civil servants do not cover the officials of local government and public corporation. In fact, the definition of civil servant excludes holders of political office, ministers, holders of judicial offices and members of the armed forces. However, a general term which encompasses the officials in both civil service and those in the other government services is referred to as public servants.

Nigerian Civil Servants, Masters or Servants
This section is intended to examine the attitude, approach and behaviour of Nigerian civil servants as regards the way they carry out their responsibilities and their relationship with the individuals and the community they serve. This is pertinent because all sorts of vices are linked to civil servants which ranges from inefficiency, laziness, absenteeism, wastefulness and corruption. (Anozoda, Okoye and Chukwuemeka, 2012). Oyediran et al (2005) captures the master nature, haughty and irresponsible behaviour of Nigerian civil servant succinctly when he opined that “civil servants are often inaccessible to the public. The officials treat members of the public impersonally and are sometimes impatient with or rude to them. This makes the Nigerian civil servants masters instead of servants to the public.

Again, a significant fraction of Nigerian civil servants are not dedicated to their duties. This makes them delay attending to people's files and sometimes consciously or unconsciously misplace these files. According to Okoli and Onah (2010), members of the civil service derive psychic satisfaction in the manner they treat mere citizens. This supports Sartre (1969) assertion on interpersonal relations, where he observed that 'attitude
of indifference' is 'a kind of blindness with respect to others', an attitude by which a person remains blind to others request and demand. Omorogbe (1991: 102) added that this makes relation with other people mechanical, that is, people are treated likes machine and reduced only to the functions they perform in the society. This is indeed an attitude of bad faith. In order to prevent and ameliorate this kind of behaviour among civil servants, Sharma, Sadana and Haur (2012) thus suggested that civil servant should not be allowed to stay in the same place or post for a long time, that this makes them develop vested interests and attachments which come in the way of their independent functioning and that civil servants should appreciate, respect and help human beings flourish in their existential journey.

Recommendations
1) That civil servants should be monitored by their superiors.
2) That they should receive regular orientation on how to attend to the members of the public who come to their offices on daily bases.
3) Civil servants should be more dedicated and devoted to their duty.
4) Civil servants should be given regular training in their area of proficiency so as to ensure professionalism in the system.

Conclusion
Since after independence, civil servants have mainly attended to the vested interests of bureaucrats, politician and those engaged in the accumulation of public resources for their selfish interest. Because of this, civil servants has over looked their ultimate goal which is to raise the quality of services delivered to the people by engaging in economic and social development, support and enhance their capacity to carry out government core functions. Again, their attitude to work and to the people that come offices has been that of indifference and nonchalant. Hence civil servants in the Nigerian civil service should see themselves as servants and not as masters who lord it over every one that come around. If they see themselves as serving the people by changing their attitude to work, it will enhance their performance and bring about public trust, human flourishing and common good.
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References


