

Career Planning and its challenges in the Nigerian Civil Service

Dialoke, I.

*Department of Human Resource Management
College of Management Sciences
Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike*

ABSTRACT

Times have always been difficult and uncertain, especially when the existential concerns of the moment such as lack of funds, training, nepotism, greed, politics among many others have served as the basis for career and career planning in Nigeria civil service, much to the detriment of ethos and practices of equity and justice to all and sundry (including civil servants). Therefore increasing competition, accelerating change and relentless restructuring currently going on in Nigeria bureaucracy has made career planning critical and paramount for both organizations and employees. In the face of this dolorous situation, it has set forth career planning as the panacea to the issue of poor career development in modern Nigerian civil service. Explaining this issue remains the thrust of this study as it investigates career planning in Nigeria civil service.

Keywords: *Career Planning, Nigeria civil service, training, nepotism, politics*

INTRODUCTION

The African experience (Nigeria inclusive) with civil service reforms is generally mixed. Reforms such as downsizing and rightsizing, do not only threaten the careers of civil servants in such settings, but threaten the well being of the network of kin, etc. supported by the job holders (Hilderbrand and Grindle, 1994). Nonetheless, Nigeria is one of the most populous nations in Africa with a span population of over one hundred million people coming from divergent ethnic groups and cultures. However, this teeming population is realistically seeking for where they should engage themselves for social and economic survival. As a means to achieve this, some of the citizens engage in private activities or jobs, while others find themselves in civil service. It is at this stage that the lucky employees in government organizations (civil service) will start to build on their career with relevant skills so as to achieve set goals. Therefore, development of career through career planning becomes highly necessary for the civil servants who are under the payroll of government. This is to ensure that the right persons are matched with the right activities within the bureaucracy. Thus career planning, even though practiced in “principle” in Nigeria with little pragmatic approach, is confronted with problems such as lack of fund, training, nepotism, the policy, loss of interest resulting from redtapism and bias in selecting candidates for overseas workshop/seminars among others. Nevertheless career planning in Nigeria became a

Dialoke, I., PhD is a lecturer in the Department of Human Resource Management, College of Management Sciences, Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike, Abia State, Nigeria. He may reached at E-mail: drikechukwudialoke@yahoo.com

pertinent issue within the policy in view of quest for white-collar job and a decline in career planning among employees in Nigeria civil service.

Career and Career Planning

Career refers to an occupation or profession in which one must have received special training. A career is basically one's life work from where one earns his or her livelihood. It also refers to the all purpose course or progression of one's professional achievements (chitthavanjan) career also is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as a person's "course or progress through life (or distinct portion of life)". In this definition, career is understood to relate to a range of aspects of an individual's life, learning and work. Career is also frequently understood to relate to the working aspects of an individual's life as in career woman. Therefore, a third way in which the term career is used to describe an occupation or a profession that usually involves special training or formal education, and is considered to be a person's life work (Bertold, 2011). In this case, "career" is seen as a sequence of related jobs usually pursued within a single industry or sector, for example "a career in law" or "a career in the building trade". Nonetheless, the ethymology of the term comes from the M. French word *carriere* (16ci) ("road, race course") which, in turn, comes from the Latin word (via) *cararia* (track for wheeled vehicles) which originated from the latin word "carrus" which means wagon. Career planning is an ongoing process that can help you manage your learning and development. Career planning is the continuous process of:

- Thinking about ones' interests, values, skills, and preferences,
- Exploring the life, work and learning options available to a person,
- Ensuring that ones' work fits with his/her personal circumstances and
- Continuously fine-tuning his/her work and learning plans to help him/her manage the changes in life and the world of work.

The Nigerian Civil Service and Career Planning

Civil service can be defined as all of the people and departments in government who are not involved directly in the creation and judging of laws, but rather, are the ones who deal with the regulations and implementation of the laws on a daily basis. The term civil service can refer to either a branch of governmental service in which the basis of professional merit as proven by competitive examinations or body of employees in any government agency other than the military. Therefore, the extent of civil servants of a State as part of the civil service varies from country to country. For instance, in United Kingdom, only crown (national government) employees are referred to as civil servants while county or city employees are not. But in Nigeria, every employee who finds himself or herself in government at all levels is referred to as "civil servant". The Nigerian civil service consists of employees in Nigerian government agencies other than the military. Most employees are career civil servants in the Nigerian ministries, progressing based on qualifications and seniority. However, the head of service has been introducing measures to make the ministries more efficient and responsive to the public (Federal Government 2009). Thus the Nigerian Civil Service has its origin in organizations established by the British in colonial times. Nigeria gained full independence in October 1960 under a constitution that provided for a

parliamentary government and a substantial measure of self-government for the country's three regions. Since then, various panels have studied and made recommendations for reforming the civil service, including the Margan commission of 1963, Adebo Commission of 1971, Udoji Commission of 1972-1974. The Dotun Philips Panel of 1985 attempted to reform the civil service. The 1988 Civil Service Reorganization Decree Promulgated by General Ibrahim Babangida had a major impact on the structure and efficiency of the civil service. Also the later report of Ayida panel made recommendations to reverse some of the past innovations and to return to more efficient civil service of earlier years (office of the Head of service of the Federation, 2009). The civil service has been undergoing gradual and systematic reforms and restructuring since May 29, 1999 after decades of military rule Babura, 2003). However, the civil service is still considered stagnant and inefficient, and the attempts made in the past by panels have had little effect (Daily trust 2009). Furthermore, in August 2009, the then Head of Civil service, Stephen Osagiede Oronsaye proposed reforms where permanent secretaries and directors would spend a maximum of eight years in office. The reform which received subsequent approval from President Umaru Yaradua, would result in massive retirement of permanent secretaries and directors, many of whom are from the North (Oronsaye, 2009).

Subsequently, he asserted that his goal for the Nigerian civil service is to be among the best organized and managed in the world (Atiku, 2009). However, his reforms were not implemented until his retirement in November 2010 as a result of age (Idonor and Ovuakporie, 2010), his reforms were not implemented. Compared with the 1960's and 1970's, the civil service by 1990 had changed dramatically. It had been politicized to the extent that most top officials openly supported the government of the day. The introduction of quota system of recruitment and promotion, adherence to the federal-character principle and constant interference of the government in the day to day operation of the civil service- especially through frequent changes in top officials and massive purges, meant that political factors rather than merit alone played a major role in the Nigerian civil service.

There are three basic types of career planning namely: long-term, mid-range and immediate. To this extent, career planning for civil servants can take a long-term approach. The employee has to start building his or her career plan from the inception of the job so that when they go on retirement they will be able to adapt with the already existed career plans established while in office. Mid-range career planning seeks the employee to plan three to five years out. It places the employee in the position of knowing what the next step in life might be. It might be identifying what level of skill to acquire to ascend the ranks and make the transition to mid-level associate. It is, therefore, important to know what the next career step is because it can inform where one currently is and the choices one is making. An immediate or short-range career plan is an absolute must, because it involves identifying what a person's most important career priority is for the current year. This gives an employee the liberty to start his/her year whenever it makes sense to him/her. It might be after a review cycle within the year. However many people in society including the civil servants view career planning as a luxury. That is something they just do not have time for. However, it is a critical tool for an employee's career success.

There is a six-step process of career planning in which decision making is considered to be the most important. These six-step processes are helpful in career planning in birth state and federal civil service in Nigeria.

Step one

Interest and strength identification: Understanding oneself in terms of values, personal traits, experiences and desired life style will put one in a better position to make educational options and evaluate career alternatives that are best suited to that person. This can be done by having some self-assessments to gather information about one's interest aptitude and career inclination. Based on the information provided, the assessments identify a person's personality and subsequently provide advice on occupations that may best fit him or her.

Step two

Information gathering: This includes gathering information about the types of career available to you from a variety of sources. In this regard, the clients should participate in career fairs, visit work places and do a career research. These activities enable one to find out more about the nature of the jobs that interest him/her, such as educational requirements, salaries, working conditions, prospects that can help one to make a career choice.

Step three

Evaluation: In order to find out the best career to fit ones interests and skills, evaluate the information gathered and narrow careers, teachers, parents, family members and friends. Usually interests and personality, the closest may be the career for you.

Step four

Decision making and Goal setting: In this case, set goals and take action to make decision about your career choice.

Step five

Plan making: Once you have decided what occupation matches up best with you then you can begin developing a career plan to reach your career goal. Review your plan every year and make some alternations if required.

Step six

Career Preparation: After determining what career path you want to follow, assess what you need to do to prepare for that career. For example, do you need vocational training? If so, research the schools that offer the kind of training you need. Select a school that offers a college degree or training programme which meets your career goal and financial need. Also find out the availability of financial aids that supports you in obtaining your career goal.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Frequent changes in the civil service reforms have accounted for outright delay or denial of career progression of the civil servants. Hence the career planning cannot be achieved in an atmosphere of political instability and administrative uncertainty. This is because most workers who are expected to be trained through in service training workshop/seminars

and so on to enhance their career goals could no longer do so. How can career planning be achieved in a situation of politicization of the civil service? Obviously the answer to the question is that it cannot be visible. Since civil servants will now be engaged into politicking so as to enable government in power select them for workshops/seminars other than those who merit the training for career prospects and progression. Nigeria as it is, with ethnic cleavages extant in both federal, state and local governments is paying only “lips” attention to career planning of civil servants. As such, the civil service of Nigeria is fast deteriorating and could not stand the taste of modern civil service in the world vis-à-vis career planning and development.

The thesis of career planning seemed to have been wide spread at the beginning of career choice in both developed and developing economies. However, the concepts of career, career planning and civil service in Nigeria were discussed. Drawing inferences from extant literature in the work and through in depth analysis of the central thesis, the study concludes that “career planning” in principle and practice takes a lot of work in assisting career civil servants develop their skills, but there is nothing more rewarding doing something you enjoy and getting paid for it.

REFERENCES

- Atiku, S. S.** (2009). Nigerian civil service will be best in Africa. *Daily Triumph* June, 19.
- Babura, A. S. M.** (2003). Leading public service innovation, the case of Nigerian civil service and Federal civil service commission, 6th March.
- Bertold, T.** (2011). International civil service update or China’s examination Hell: The civil service examination of imperial China. *History Today* October, 25. Accessed at <http://www.hg.org/article/asp?id=7743>
- Daily Trust** (2009). New policy in the civil service 2nd September
- Federal Government of Nigeria** (2009): Background to the Nigerian civil service, office of the Head of service of the federation
- Hilderbrand, M. E.** and **Grindle M. S.** (1994): Central African Republic building sustainable capacity: challenges for the public sector. New York: UNDP
- Idonor, D.** and **Ovuakporie, E.** (2010). Jonathan Appoints Afolabi Head of service as Oronsaye Retires, *Vanguard*, November 16
- Imperial China** (2011). Civil service Examinations, Princeton University, October, 25
- Oronsaye, S. O.** (2009). Ripples of Tenure System in the civil service. *Nigerian Tribune* 18th September
- Oxford English Dictionary:** Career
- Steps of Career Planning:** <http://www.careercentre.dtwd.wa.gov.au/>
- Types of Career Planning:** <http://blog.legalsolutions.thomsonreuters.com>
- Definition of Career:** <http://dictionary.reference.com.2012>
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/career>
- Definition of Civil Service:** <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/civilservice>
- Nigeria Civil Service:** <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/nigeriacivilservice>