

Bureaucratic Theory and Its Influence on Workers' Productivity Improvement in Nigerian Universities

Obadara E. Olabanji

Tai Solarin University of Education, Ogun State, Nigeria

Department of Educational Management

Email: doctorobadara@yahoo.co.uk

Abstract

The study examined the contribution of bureaucratic theory to workers' productivity improvement in Nigerian universities. A descriptive research design of the survey type was used for the study. A sample of 10 universities in the south west Nigeria – five state-owned and five federal-owned – using simple random sampling technique was selected. Also, simple random sampling was used to select 20 respondents including academic and non-academic staff (senior staff) amounting to 200 respondents. The study developed and used a questionnaire titled: "Bureaucratic Principles and Workers' Productivity Questionnaire (BPWQ)" with a reliability correlation coefficient (r) of 0.90. Multiple regression analysis was employed to analyse the data, while the null hypotheses developed for the study were tested at .05 level of significance. The findings revealed that there was significant composite influence of bureaucratic principles on workers' productivity improvement in Nigerian universities. Also, there was significant influence of division of labour and specialization, hierarchy of authority, stipulated rules and regulation, records, impersonal orientation, and employment and promotion of staff based on technical competence on workers' productivity improvement in Nigerian universities. It is therefore recommended among others that skilful and qualified workers should be employed at every level in Nigerian universities, their appointments and promotions should be based on merit and competence as established by bureaucratic principles.

Keywords: bureaucracy, productivity improvement, technical competence, impersonality, authority, universities

The ultimate goal of every organization be it public or private is productivity improvement. Basically, productivity is a ratio to measure how well an organization converts its input resources (man, materials, machines, management etc.) into goods and services. This is usually expressed in ratios of inputs to outputs, that is, (input) cost per (output) good/service. It means how efficient an organization converts its inputs into outputs. Productivity improvement involves as many workers as possible irrespective of their positions and areas of potential improvement, and no organization can afford to ignore the constant need to improve productivity. Productivity improvement therefore means raising the conversion of organization inputs into outputs in a most efficient manner, that is, increasing productivity with the same amount of labour, materials, machine, time, and technology. It is an assessment of the

efficiency of a worker or group of workers. It can be achieved if the level of output is increased faster than that of input or if the level of input is decreased faster than that of output. In another words, there is productivity improvement if an organization produces more output with the same level of input or with a reduced level of input. There is no doubt that appointment of skilful workers or experts, the use of improved methods and techniques, investment in modern equipment and technology may equally aid productivity improvement.

Max Weber (1947) defined bureaucratic concept of organization and administration as a pyramidal, hierarchical organizational structure in which power for making decisions flows from super-ordinates to the subordinates. Weber identified three types of organizations namely: leader-oriented organization, patriarchal or patrimonial organization, and bureaucratic organization. He regarded bureaucratic organization as the most efficient type because it is designed to provide the maximum of rationality in human behaviour. Bureaucracy is specifically based on division of labour and it is the natural response to administrative strategy demanded by organizational complexity (Obadara, 2012). Bureaucratic organizations always rely heavily on the principle of hierarchy and rank, which requires a clear, unambiguous chain of command through which "higher" officials supervise the "lower" officials, who of course supervise their own subordinate administrators within the various subdivisions and sub-subdivisions of the organization (Wilson, 2009).

Weber emphasized the importance of administration based on expertise (rules of experts) and administration based on discipline (rules of officials). Effective organization is based on structure and delegation through different layers of the hierarchy. Greater specialization and the application of expertise and technical knowledge have highlighted the need for laid-down procedures (Mullins, 2010). The key characteristics of bureaucratic theory according to Weber (1947) are the following:

- *Division of Labour and Specialization:* Weber believes that the organizational tasks should be distributed among the members of the organization in relation to their competence or specialization. It is important that these tasks are split into units or activities in order to assign them to specific offices or positions. This is because the tasks of an organization are too complex to be performed by a single individual. This principle will definitely enable workers to develop great skills, which in turn increase effectiveness and the interest of the staff.
- *Stipulated Rules and Regulations:* Bureaucracy believes in formally established rules and regulations in order to ascertain coordination, continuity, and uniformity in the performance of organizational tasks. Without rules and regulations governing official functions of the organization, such an organization will be in shambles. These rules and regulations include rights, obligations, duties and operations of all the members of the organization.

- *Hierarchy of Authority:* The bureaucratic principle also emphasizes hierarchical authority structure, that is, the positions or offices are structured in hierarchy. Each lower office is under the control and supervision of the higher one. In Weber's view, it is the duty of the higher officers to supervise and control the junior officers, as a result, there will be a clear chain of command in the organization.
- *Impersonal Orientation:* This implies that the organization should be free of personal sentiments and preferential treatments. According to Weber, the working atmosphere under bureaucratic principle should be formal and impersonal. The operation within the organization should be devoid of favouritism or oppression in any form. Every member of staff should be treated equally at all times.
- *Employment and Promotion of Staff Based on Technical Competence:* In Weber's view, technical rules or norms should be the rules that regulate the conduct of the organization. This is because bureaucratic principle advocates that employment and promotion of staff should be based on technical knowledge i.e. merit principle. If this application is to be seen as rational, specialized training is therefore necessary. So far people who have exhibited adequate technical competence are qualified to be appointed in the organization. Appointment and promotion should not be based on "who you know".
- *Records.* Weber believes that a bureaucratic organization should keep and preserve complete and adequate files for all its activities. It would serve as "organizational memory" where accurate and complete documents concerning all bureaucratic actions and information could be retrieved.

There is no doubt that labour constitutes the highest cost of many organizations and combined with individual workers' performance forms organizational productivity, therefore studying the influence of bureaucratic theory on workers' productivity improvement is a worthwhile effort.

Statement of the Problem

Virtually all administrators would believe that training improves workers' knowledge and skills, which in turn leads to increase in organization productivity. It is also acknowledged that investment in qualified and quality staff, equipment and new technology, employees' motivation and other resources-oriented factors will boost output per employee and ultimately improve and increase organizational productivity. It is also possible to have all the aforementioned efficacies on ground yet the organizational productivity is low if the workers are not well coordinated. Productivity being an attitude of mind, its continuous improvement requires the application of new theories and new methods. Therefore, this study examined the influence of bureaucratic principles on university workers' productivity improvement in the south west Nigeria.

Purpose of the Study

This study empirically established the contribution of bureaucratic theory to workers' productivity improvement in Nigerian universities with the aim of making recommendations on the effective application of bureaucratic principles for better administration and improved workers' productivity in Nigerian universities.

Literature Review

Some authors have criticized bureaucracy in the past, for instance, Lazer (2002) compared public and private sectors, and stated that with survival less of an issue, and relative performance more difficult to measure, bureaucratic inertia is likely a greater barrier to adopting successful innovations in the public sector than in the private. While Burns and Stalker (1961) observed that highly bureaucratic organizations were resistant to change. A prevailing atmosphere of hierarchy, control, efficiency and predictability meant that organizational members favoured self-continuity and felt threatened by change. Such organizations, thus, were poor at innovating or at embracing new ideas. Gouldner (1954) found that the 'govern according to rules' culture in bureaucratic organizations led to the consequence of members following the minimum possible rules in order to get by. Thus, it was problematical to obtain much more than minimally acceptable behaviour from members.

Charles (2011) studied the influence of bureaucracy on the effectiveness of corporations in Jordan and found that management by formal rule hinders decision making and employee's ability to response to turbulent environment. Further finding from the study showed that there is no significant relationship between bureaucratic principles and workers' innovations in the organization. Using survey research design, Aule and Odo (2015) studied the effect of over rigidity of rules in public organizations in Ondo State, Nigeria. The population of the study was 350 respondents and questionnaire was used to obtain primary data for the study. Applying descriptive statistics on the data collected, the study revealed that over rigidity of rules in Ondo State civil service hindered workers' initiative and their performance.

Similarly, Ayodele (2015) investigated the effect of bureaucracy in public organizations in Lagos State. The research employed a survey research design and a population of 380 employees was selected from 15 public organizations in Lagos State, Nigeria. Regression analysis was adopted for data analysis and test of hypotheses. The study found that bureaucratic inefficiency in Lagos public organizations is rooted in the element of its disparity with the ideal kind of Weberian bureaucracy where offices are not filled on merit, but on basis of other extraneous conditions such as ethnicity, favoritism and religious inclination among others. This leads to a situation where the wrong candidates are recruited and assigned tasks that are meant for professionals.

Murhammed and Nasir (2014) carried out a study to determine the effect of bureaucracy on coordination in the civil service in Kaduna State, Nigeria. The study adopted a survey research design and questionnaire was used

for data collection. The sample size for the study was 400 selected from Kaduna public service. Chi-Square statistical technique was used for data analysis and test of hypotheses. The study found that specialization and assignment of tasks in Kaduna State civil service increased the challenge of lack of coordination. Also, it was found that failure to recognize the importance of informal relations that exist in public organizations in Kaduna led to a tense relationship between the government and labour unions in the state.

However, researchers have also found that bureaucracy works well in certain contexts (Mashaw, 1983) and the theory of bureaucracy has been used in a variety of contexts to analyze and understand organization in society (Eisenstadt, (1968). Agboola (2016) saw bureaucracy as a rational structure of coordinating human and material resources into a complex setting handled by professionals or experts. Blau (1956) defined bureaucracy as organization that maximizes efficiency in administration, whatever its formal characteristics, or as an institutionalized method of organizing social conduct in the interests of administrative efficiency. Also, bureaucratic principles have been seen as having direct influence on workers' performance and productivity (Ingraham, Joyce, & Donahue, 2003; Lynn, Heinrich, & Hill, 2001).

McNutt (2002) observed that the aim of bureaucratic theory was to put forward certain sets of ideal characteristics for each and every bureaucratic mechanism including profit-maximising firms. Moreover, Weber was also trying to create the most appropriate way of management in organizations to assure that a staff can enhance his technical competence as well as apply it to certain practical cases. Bureaucratic theory is a way of accomplishing organizational effectiveness and proficiency in service delivery through effective leadership, order, division of work and specialization, chain of command, useful specificity, standards, directions and procedures (Alornyeku, 2011). Danjuma and Kamaruddin (2014) saw bureaucracy as a system of administration aims at enhancing efficiency in both public and private organizations based on clearly laid down rules, regulations and the legitimate use of formal authority. It is a system where accentuation is placed on legitimate authority, knowledge and qualification as the basis for selection into public service and many public organizations as well as other organizations today have profited from the theory. Division of work in organizations has been a crucial feature of their structures. Dividing labour into clear specialized authority and obligations that are legitimized as official obligations helps to increase workers' performance (Danjuma & Philip, 2016).

The impartial principle of bureaucracy provides consistency and the generalizability of the rules and applications; therefore, it increases fairness and justice. It equally influences workers' motivations to work and perform better (Peters 2010), which can also have positive spillover effects on business and society. For instance, Nistotskaya and Cingolani (2015) argued that meritocratic recruitment and tenure protection of public bureaucracies assure impartiality and stability in the implementation of rules for entrepreneurs. Their work

empirically demonstrates a link between meritocratic recruitment and entrepreneurship and individual choices to engage in new businesses. In fact, bureaucratic impartiality helps business actors make investments in innovation. Overall, bureaucracies can increase private actors' incentives for innovation by using policy tools, such as legal and administrative regulations and research and development programmes, leading to an increase in the overall innovation outputs of a country (Smith 1997). Impartiality can also increase trust, and trust can lead to a more innovative bureaucracy (Fukuyama 2013).

On workers' productivity, Sharma and Sharma (2014) discussed the advantages of employee productivity and concluded that higher productivity results in economic growth, higher profitability, and social progress. It is only by increasing productivity that employees can obtain better wages/ salaries, working conditions and larger employment opportunities. While Hill, Jones, and Schilling (2014) claimed that higher productivity tends to maximize organizational competitive advantage through cost reductions and improvement in high quality of output. Cato and Gordon (2009) also demonstrated that the alignment of the strategic vision to employee productivity is a key contributor to the success of an organization. This alignment as a result would motivate and inspire employees to be more creative, and this ultimately can improve their performance effectiveness to accomplish organizational goals and objectives (Morales, Cory, & Bozell, 2001; Obdulio, 2014).

Having looked at literature on bureaucracy, the sections that follow analyse literature on workers' productivity. Researchers have established the relationship between motivation and happiness, and workers' productivity (Banjoko, 2006; Islam & Ismail, 2008; Kim, 2006; Singh, Bhandarker, & Rai, 2012; Zahra, 2014); and the influence of training and development on workers' productivity (Vinesh, 2014; Zahra, 2014). Generally, most organizations through the use of incentives seek out ways to motivate their work force and these incentives could be in form of good working conditions, work environment and compensation amongst others. Incentives are regarded as variable payments (monetary and non-monetary) made to workers or a team of workers based on the quantity of output or results attained. On the other hand, these can be seen as payments made with the purpose of stimulating workers' performance and productivity levels towards achieving greater objectives (Banjoko, 2006).

Therefore, one can conclude that there is a link between motivation and productivity, which is due to the fact that a lack of motivation leads to a decrease in productivity and vice versa. Kim (2006) highlighted in his research article that employee motivation has been a principle concern for organizations, managers, and even first line supervisors because this motivation has been and will be the deciding factor in workers' productivity and in turn decide the success or failure of an organization. Islam & Ismail's study (2008) revealed that productivity improvement requires more than just customer service, technology, decentralization, or process reengineering, and that whether these

approaches succeed or fail will depend largely on the motivation of the employees who are asked to implement them.

Hong (1995) studied the impact of employee benefits on work motivation and productivity considering effort, commitment, work-quality promotion, and command of work – the first two belonging to work motivation and the last two to productivity. They found that the impact of employee benefit on work motivation was greater than it is on productivity. They also revealed that monetary benefit programmes are most highly valued by both executives and workers. The result shows that both corporate offers and worker demands are primarily money oriented. Prasada (2006) studied a multi-factor incentive scheme to practically incentivize and reward employees aiming at improving productivity in a manufacturing unit. The amount of incentive earned by each employee was calculated, as per the scheme, every month and paid along with the salary. It was demonstrated that the implementation of this scheme motivated the employees of the company to improve production levels, achieve better consumption of raw materials and thus achieve higher productivity.

In addition, Oswald, Proto and Sgroi (2015) explored the effect of major unhappiness shocks – bereavement and family illness – in the real world on workers' productivity. The study involved almost 800 subjects who performed a task and after they completed the task were asked whether they had experienced a bereavement or family illness in the last two years. Subjects who had experienced a bad life event reported lower happiness and had about 10% lower productivity than subjects who had not experienced a bad life event.

It should be noted as stated above that research studies have been carried out on the positive contributions and the weakness of bureaucratic theory in both public and private organizations. Also, various studies have been conducted to establish what factor(s) contribute or improve workers' productivity. The present study is therefore interested in the influence of bureaucratic theory on workers' productivity in Nigerian universities.

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were developed and tested in the study;

Ho₁: There is no significant composite influence of application of bureaucratic principles on workers' productivity improvement in Nigerian universities

Ho₂: There is no significant relative influence of application of bureaucratic principles on workers' productivity improvement in Nigerian universities

Methodology

Descriptive research design of the survey type was used for the study. A total of 10 universities in the south west Nigeria, five state owned and five federal owned were sampled using simple random sampling technique. Simple random sampling was also used to select 20 respondents including academic and non-academic staff (senior staff) amounted to 200 respondents. The study developed and used a questionnaire titled: "Bureaucratic Principles and Workers' Productivity Questionnaire (BPWQ)" with Cronbach alpha correlation

coefficient (r) of 0.90. The questionnaire had three sections. The first section elicited information on the respondents' demographic data while the second section contained 18 items that solicited responses on their practices of bureaucratic principles and the third section contained 15 items that solicited responses on workers' productivity. It was constructed on a 4-point Likert format ranging from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'. Multiple regression analysis was employed to analyse the data, while the null hypotheses developed for the study were tested at .05 level of significance.

Presentation of Results

The results of the study are presented according to the hypotheses developed for the study.

H_{01} : There is no significant composite influence of application of bureaucratic principles on workers' productivity improvement in Nigerian universities.

Table 1

Regression Analysis of the Influence of Application of Bureaucratic Principles on Workers' Productivity Improvement in Nigerian Universities

Model Summary ^b				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.625 ^a	.433	.419	6.24

^a Predictors: (Constant) Bureaucratic Principles

^b Dependent Variable: Workers' Productivity Improvement

Table 2

Analysis of Variance

ANOVA ^b					
Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	297.155	6	49.526	16.437	.000 ^a
Residual	581.434	193	3.013		
Total	878.589	199			

^a Predictors: (Constant) Bureaucratic Principles

^b Dependent Variable: Workers' Productivity Improvement

*Significant ($p < 0.05$)

Table 1 shows the result of the influence of bureaucratic principles on workers' productivity improvement in Nigerian universities. This result shows a coefficient of multiple regression (R) of 0.625 of the influence of bureaucratic principles on workers' productivity improvement in Nigerian universities. It shows the multiple regression square (R^2) of 0.433 and multiple regression square (R^2) of 0.419 (adjusted). It means that about 43.3% of the variance in the workers' productivity improvement in Nigerian universities is explained by bureaucratic principles (overall). The observed F -ratio in Table 2 is 16.437 (significant at the 0.05 level). Due to this result, the null hypothesis, which states that, "there is no significant composite influence of bureaucratic principles on workers' productivity improvement in Nigerian universities" is

rejected. This significant F-value is an indication that the combination of all the bureaucratic principles in influencing workers' productivity improvement in Nigerian universities could not have occurred by chance.

Ho₂: There is no significant relative influence of bureaucratic principles on workers' productivity improvement in Nigerian universities.

Table 3

Parameter Estimate of the Influence of Bureaucratic Principles on Workers' Productivity Improvement in Nigerian Universities

Variable	Coefficients				
	Unstandardized Coefficients	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
Division of Labour & Specialization	0.341	0.221	.305	1.521	.005*
Stipulated Rules & Regulation	0.354	0.251	.226	1.341	.000*
Hierarchy of Authority	0.298	0.211	.299	1.328	.001*
Impersonal Orientation	0.315	0.232	.198	1.212	.000*
Technical Competence	0.324	0.244	.187	1.412	.002*
Records	0.348	0.281	.204	1.365	.000*
(Constant)	8.212	1.442		3.133	.000*

*Significant at $p < 0.05$

Table 3 shows the results of the hypothesis 2 (Ho₂). The results show the relative influence of each principle of bureaucracy on workers' productivity improvement in Nigerian universities. The Table shows the standardized regression weight (β), the standard error of estimate, T-ratio and the level at which the T- ratio is significant. As indicated in this table above, the standardized regression weights associated with the principles reveal that all the bureaucratic principles significantly influence workers' productivity improvement in Nigerian universities. The values of the standardized regression weights (β) associated with these principles indicate that "division of labour and specialization" is the most potent contributor to the prediction of workers' productivity improvement in Nigerian universities ($\beta = .305$), followed by "hierarchy of authority" ($\beta = .288$), "stipulated rules and regulation" ($\beta = .226$), "records" ($\beta = .204$), "impersonal orientation" ($\beta = .198$), and "employment and promotion of staff based on technical competence" ($\beta = .187$). These results therefore reveal that there is significant influence of division of labour and specialization, hierarchy of authority, stipulated rules and regulation, records, impersonal orientation, and employment and promotion of staff based on

technical competence on workers' productivity improvement in Nigerian universities.

Discussion of Findings

This study found significant composite influence of bureaucratic principles on workers' productivity improvement in Nigerian universities. Also, there is significant influence of division of labour and specialization, hierarchy of authority, stipulated rules and regulation, records, impersonal orientation, and employment and promotion of staff based on technical competence on workers' productivity improvement in Nigerian universities. The reason for these results might not be unconnected with fact that Weber's bureaucratic principles have been widely adopted in both public and private sectors throughout the world including the institutions of higher learning. All these principles in no doubt increase or aid the accomplishment of organizational goals and objectives. Despite the criticisms raved against Weber's theory of bureaucracy by some scholars (Stewart, 2009; Argyris, 2004), it is not a gainsaying that one can hardly see an organization that does not adopt one or two principles of bureaucracy unless such an organization does not grow because complexity produces bureaucracy.

No wonder Cloke and Goldsmith (2002) observed that management and bureaucracy can be thought of as flip sides of the same coin. The elements of bureaucracy generate original hierarchy and management, while managers generate a need for bureaucracy.

The public organizations, universities in particular demand for uniformity of treatment, regularity of procedures and public accountability for their operations, this leads to adherence to specified rules and procedures and to the keeping of detailed records (Mullins, 2010). In exhibiting this, increased bureaucracy comes into operation. This present study is also in agreement with Wilson (2009), who confirmed that bureaucracy is still relevant today as a major form of organization structure. Its principles are useful and beneficial to various organizations.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that bureaucracy is still relevant in this present-day universities' administration. The application of bureaucratic principles in the university's administration ensures essential values and ethics. It equally ascertains smooth running of the universities and enables the workers to function effectively, efficiently and consistently.

Recommendations

Based on the above findings, it is therefore recommended that skilful and qualified workers should be employed at every level in Nigerian universities, their appointments and promotions should be based on merit and competence as established by bureaucratic principles.

Job or task should be assigned based on the specialization of individual workers in a university. The span of control and chain of command should be properly spelt out in the university administration so as to avoid conflict.

Rules and regulations governing official functions of the university should be taken with utmost seriousness. Staff and student records should be adequately kept and preserved for easy retrieval of information all times.

The university administration should be free of personal sentiments and preferential treatments, every member of staff should be treated equally at all times. All these must be strictly adhered to so as to improve workers' productivity in Nigerian universities.

Various productivity improvement techniques could also be tested and adopted by the administrators in Nigerian universities so as to adopt the management philosophy and techniques that would eradicate waste.

Finally, despite the emphasis of bureaucratic theory on rules and procedures, initiatives, flexibility, and adaptation must be encouraged in the administration of universities especially at the top management level.

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