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ADDRESSING POLITICIANS-CIVIL SERVANTS CONFLICTS IN THE NIGERIAN LOCAL GOVERNMENT SYSTEM

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A little attention has been paid to one of the most critical relationship between civil servants and politicians in Nigeria. To a certain extent, the neat distinctions of the politicians and civil servants were always more theoretical than real. However, modern government has had a way of eroding whatever truth, there was to this distinction. In modern government, implementation failures are often the biggest and most significant political problems a government will face. No wonder we are left asking ourselves three critical questions: Where does policy stop and implementation begins? What is the responsibility of the civil servant to the political appointee and vice-versa? In addition, who should be held accountable?. The paper examined the institutional interface of politics and administration in the Nigerian Local Government System. Secondary data were collected mainly from relevant textbooks, official documents of various ministries, reports and proceedings papers. These conflicts emanate from several sources ranging from political instability, poor financial base, and unlawful demand for an increase in wages, mismanagement of revenue allocations by the elected or appointed politicians who managed the socioeconomic and political programs of the rural populace. Then, with the existence of these conflict situations, the managers of the system are expected to have sound conflict management strategies. The inability of government bureaucracy to deliver the much- needed services to the citizens and the resultant decline in the standard of living of the people may be held by the same as a conclusive evidence of a failed Nigerian state.

Key word: Politicians, Careers Civil Servants, Local Government, Policy Making, Implementation Evaluation and Conflict.

INTRODUCTION

Local governments as the third tier of government are usually involved in one form of conflict or the other. These conflicts emanate from several sources ranging from political instability, poor financial base, and unlawful demand for an increase in wages, mismanagement of revenue allocations by the elected or appointed politicians who managed the socioeconomic and political programs of the rural populace. Then, with the existence of these conflict situations, the managers of the system are expected to have sound conflict management strategies. On the other hand, the local government system is a third tier of government, existing along side with the Federal and State Governments. As a third tier of government it is undated with a number of statutory roles and functions aimed at effective service delivery to the grassroots. As an integral part of the larger Nigerian political system, history revealed that it is characterized by crises and instability because of the rise of coups and counter coups, communal and ethnic conflicts, strikes and demonstrations (Eme *et al.*, 2017).

The high incidence of conflict and crisis hindered effective and efficient discharge of functions and services to the local populace for instance, there have been cases of disagreement between the workers and chairmen over salaries and fringe benefits, between their chairmen and the councilors over party's interest and there have equally been suspensions, impeachments, litigation among political actors, etc. But if there has been stability in the policy manual, these problems, conflicts and confusions would not arise (Eme *et al.*, 2017).

Sometimes, most chairmen over centralize authority and functions as well as an arbitrary award of contracts without consulting their councilors, NULGE nor the Key functionaries of the Local Government, this invariably generates labor management hostility coupled with the inability to pay workers salaries and allowances. The issues of conflict in the local governments of the federation leading to strike action, disruptions have been a source of worry to all stakeholders including leaders and politicians since it has remained unpreventable. Therefore, the need for the chairman as the head of the local governments to be actively involved in the resolution of conflicts is very necessary so that the official related conflicts which have often times ravaged the local governments will be curbed before it gets out of hand (Eme *et al.*, 2017).

The discourse on the relationship between political office holders and permanent and career local government staff in public administration is simply a discussion on the debate on 'Politics and Administration Dichotomy'. Although this debate has already been settled long ago, it is always referred to as a basis for determining the nature of relationship that should exist between political office holders and career officials in public organizations. The debate highlights the merits as well as the danger of mixing politics and administration in public organizations. It is against this background that we will first discuss this debate before addressing the patterns it takes, specifying and prescribing the kind of relationship that should exist between political office holders (who are involved in politics and policy-making) and career officials who are involved in administration or execution (implementation) of

policies made by political office holders (Adebayo, 1981; Onigu-Otite and Albert, 1999).

Politics and Administration Dichotomy: A Thematic Exposition: According to Adamolekun (1983), although Public Administration began to be accorded a separate identity in the United States during the 1890s, it remained as a sub-field of Politics (the term Political Science is preferred in the United States) for several more decades. In Britain it was not until the 1940s that the first chair of Public Administration was established with the significant title ‘Gladstone Professor of Government and Public Administration’ at Oxford. The majority of academic students of Public Administration in Britain today are still based in the departments of Politics or Government.

Until the past five decades, the political approach focused essentially on political theory or philosophy and political institutions. Therefore, those who approached the study of Public Administration through Political science strand focused attention on the consequences of different political philosophies for governmental administration and the study of the key governmental institutions: namely, the legislature, the executive including the administrative machinery, and the judiciary (Davis, 1974).

At the heart of the political approach is the so-called politics and administration dichotomy, which is really a debate over the extent to which public administration should be studied as part of the total political process. The first shots in the debate were fired in Wilson’s ‘The study of Administration’, in which the thesis of a politics and administration dichotomy was postulated (Wilson, 1887). The most influential statement of the antithesis was made by Paul Appleby in his Policy and Administration (1949), in which he argues that policy making cannot be separated from policy execution. While the majority of scholars are agreed on the need for a synthesis, there is still no agreement on a common ground (Appleby, 1949). This failure according to Adamolekun (1983) explains the continuing importance of the politics and administration approach in the literature. A useful book on this orientation is Self’s Administrative Theories and Politics (1977).

The chief proponent of the thesis that politics should be separated from administration was Woodrow Wilson. Woodrow Wilson was the first person who pointed out in 1887 that both these disciplines were quite separate from each other with their own specialized field. In his article on “study of administration”, he said “the field of administration is the field of business”. Administration lies outside the proper sphere of politics. Administrative questions are not political questions. Although politics sets the tasks for administration, it should not be suffered to manipulate its offices. In his article titled. “The study of Administration” which was published in 1887, Wilson (1887) that political tasks are distinct from administrative tasks, and should as such be separated. According to him, administration lies outside the proper sphere of politics and as such

administrative questions are not political questions. He argued that politics sets the tasks of administration. However, some earlier writers on the subject made a sharp distinction between politics and administration. In their view, politics were concerned with laying down of policies, whereas administration was concerned with implementing these policies economically and efficiently (Self, 1977).

Pfiffner (1935) was one of the strong advocates of this separation. As he rightly said that in some cases, politics and administration ‘are so inter-mingled and confused that a clear distinction is difficult’, and he further adds that “the line between the two should be shaded from black to various shades of grey, finally merging almost imperceptibly into the white”. According to him, politics must be controlled and confined to its proper sphere, which is the determination, crystallization and declaration of the will of the people (state). Then administration is concerned with the carrying into effect of this will once it has been made clear by political processes. He strongly recommended that politics should stick to its policy-determining role and leave administration to apply its own technical processes free from the blight or evil influence of political meddling or interference. Furthermore he said that although politics and administration cannot always be separated and isolated, they should however not be allowed to mix or interact in a meddlesome manner (Table 1).

Political Officers	Administrative Officers
Amateur	Professional
Non- Technical	Technical
Partisan	Non- Partisan
Temporary	Permanent
More Public contacts	less public contacts
More legislative contacts	less legislative contacts
More policy formulating	less policy formulating
More Decisions	More advisory
More co-ordination	more performing
Influence by popular opinion	Influence by technical data collected from study and research.

Table 1: Pfiffner’s enumeration of the points of distinction between political and administrative officers is very interesting (Pfiffner, 1935).

Among the many scholars who belong to the Wilsonian school of thought are Frank Good now, and Willoughby (1920) In his discussion, Good now made a distinction between politics and administration (Goodnow, 1914). According to him, politics is the expression of the will of the state while administration is the execution of that will. Then Willoughby on his part did not stop at making a distinction between the two concepts, but he went further to say that, administration is the fourth arm of government (Willoughby, 1920).

The proponents of the distinction between politics and administration base their logic on the evil influence which partisan politics usually brings into administration. The merits of the separation include allowing administrators free hand to bring their professional judgment and technical

competence into the implementation process of policy already formulated by the political executives. Furthermore, if political office holders interfere in the implementation process, they would likely bring in their partisan political judgment, which may work against the overall interest of the nation. Some scholars who oppose the Wilsonian thesis do so on the grounds that it is futile to attempt separating two things that are intertwined. For instance in reality, political office holders do not make policies alone without serious input (in the form of advice) from administrators. As Adebayo (1981) puts it; administrators are involved in policy-making. In his view, administrators cannot avoid some policy-making responsibility.

One of the opponents of the distinction Carl Friedrich contended that the distinction between politics and administration is a misleading one (Friedrich, 1940). Dimock (1937), on his part, argued that in fact, the two processes of politics and administration are coordinate rather than exclusive. Seen from this light, the opponents believe that the interaction of politics and administration in a healthy manner would improve the quality of policymaking and administration. For instance, the administrators can give the political office holders necessary information they need in the formulation of policy while on the other hand, the political office holders can monitor and evaluate the extent to which the administrators implement faithfully such policy. If this interaction follows laid down guidelines, the public who are being served by the politicians and administrators will benefit more.

Political processes of election, legislation and of defining the broad objectives of administration as well as the manipulation of political power provide the motivating force for the wheels of government. On the other hand, administration and administrators are mainly concerned with the administrative processes of gathering and interpreting data, offering advices and suggestions based on facts for the purposes of policy formulation and helping to implement it. Therefore, for harmonious co-existence between politics and public administration, which are two species of the same genus, there must be a lot of give-and-take between the politicians and the administration. Politics when it loses sight of what is administratively feasible degenerates into mere building castles in the air, and administration, shorn of its political context, becomes an empty nothingness.

The relationship between public administration and political science can be summed up remarking that the two disciplines are in fact species of the same genus. There is a great give and take between the two. However, in spite of the linkages between them we should not over-look the limits of their fields. Finally, in the words of John M. Gaus, there is no denying the fact that there is difference between the duties of political officers and those of administrative officers, but the differences is more of a degree rather than of a kind (Gaus, 1950). If we look to the top administrators, we will find that most of what they do is political in nature. Although,

apparently, policy-making is the function of the ministers and legislatures, yet most of the groundwork is done by the administrators behind the scenes. Generally, the top bureaucrats are so well familiar with policy-making that it takes them little time to adjust in the political arena if ever they decide to quit administration. As far as practice goes, most of the Nigerian diplomats posted abroad have, at one time or another, been top-officials in the governmental administration of our country. The bottom-line here is that politics and administration are two closely related social science disciplines, so much, so that it is difficult to draw a line of demarcation to say where politics starts and ends and where administration starts and ends. This position notwithstanding, can be said without fear of contraction that politics and politicians are mainly concerned with the theory of public administration, which means in our time a theory of politics too.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A research design is the logic that links the data to be collected and the conclusions to be drawn to initial questions of a study hence it ensures coherence. It should ensure clarity of what is to be achieved by the case study. This study adopted a case study design which according to Cohen *et al.* (2007) is a specific instance that is frequently designed to illustrate principle, the study of an instance in action. In this study, it helped to explain the conflict between career civil servants and the political class in the Nigeria local government system. With that view, the researcher used the actions and behaviors of these actors to gain in-depth information about the studied phenomenon.

According to Maree (2007), document analysis means focusing on all types of written material that could shed light on the studied phenomenon. The study of documents involves the analysis of any written material that contains information about the phenomenon being researched (De Vos *et al.*, 2011). The study of documents may help answer questions that interviews may have missed to address. The researcher would study official documents in order to fill in the gaps left open by other data gathering strategies, such as the interviews in this case. In relation to this study, the researcher analyzed documents such as the Public Service Rule, the Constitution and other related local government administration documents that would aid analysis. A major advantage of document analysis is that documents showed the reality of the situation and a clear picture of what was going on in the INEC and security outfits.

In order to convince a reader, the study findings in a qualitative research must be credible. Credibility refers to that which can be seen and believed. The key criterion or principle of good qualitative research is found in the notion of trustworthiness and neutrality of its findings or decisions (Babbie *et al.*, 2005). Just as a quantitative study cannot be considered valid unless it is reliable, a qualitative study cannot be called transferable unless it is credible, and it cannot be deemed credible unless it is dependable.

Trustworthiness entails credibility and transferability, which is the extent to which the findings can be transferred to other context (Bassey, 1981). Babbie *et al.* (2005) explains that transferability refers to the extent to which the findings can be applied in other contexts or with other respondents. In a qualitative study, the obligation for demonstrating transferability rests on those who wish to apply to it to the receiving context (Babbie *et al.*, 2005).

In ensuring that the study has credibility and trustworthiness, the researcher used multiple data collection instruments, for an example, online and document analysis. Again, the researchers ensured that the sources confirm whether the transcript of the data analyzed is a correct reflection of the information provided to the researchers by allowing them to have access to read the data collected or by giving the participants a report back.

Maree (2007) believes that data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure and meaning to the mass of collected data. Data analysis consists of examining, categorizing, tabulating and recombining (Bell, 2001). The process of data analysis takes place once data collection and checking have been completed. Data analysis may begin informally during interviews and continue during transcriptions, when recurring patterns, themes and categories become evident. Once written records are available, analysis involves the coding of data and the identification of salient points or structures. Qualitative data, which forms the gist of this research, was subject through data analysis techniques, which find compatibility in each other. The technique to be used in the study is the content analysis. The data collected was analyzed according to themes.

Areas of Conflict: In the local government system, there are several sources of conflicts. The following are sources of possible conflicts: demand for regular payment of salaries and wages, political intrigues on revenue allocation, intra-local government, and crisis management and labor relations crisis and local government autonomy among others. In the practice, it is usual to hear career officials complaining that political office holders (such as Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Supervisors, Councilors and Party officials) interfere often and unnecessarily in the implementation of already approved policies of the local government. For instance, such political office holders are accused of interfering in matters such as the transfer, promotion, deployment, control and the discipline of career staff in such a manner that is counter-productive.

Administrators do at times complain that political office holders who are not well informed in certain matters of importance to administration are regrettably the ones who make policies that have to be implemented by them that are experts. In some cases, administrators accuse political office holders of making policies that contravene either the provisions of the constitution or established civil service rules and guidelines. This kind of situation usually brings unhealthy

quarrel between the two sides, and in the process, delays may arise and people may suffer greatly. The structural weakness by not specifying the role of various political office holders on one hand and that of the career office holders on the other do trigger off conflicts in the local councils.

For instance, the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria has abnormalities in its provisions on local government councils. The provisions in the constitution could not make clear whether it is the National Assembly that is to create local government councils or the State House of Assembly. This has brought about conflict between Lagos State government and other States and the Federal Government over creation of additional local government council, leading to non-release of funds meant for local government councils in 2003 (Yates, 2003).

Moreover, the constitution has failed to streamline the role of accounting officer in the local government. Finally, the state governments have overwhelming political powers over local governments and this often lead to dissolution of councils by state governor at will. For instance, administrators in many occasions take side with the executive arm of the local government when there is conflict between it and the legislature. It is tempting for the career officials to align with the executive because of the enormous powers it has (i.e. the executive) in the day-to-day operation of the local government. When such loyalty is given blindly (in a situation where the executive and legislative councils are quarrelling), the councilors may turn round later to make things difficult for career administrators.

Related to the above is the problem of allocation of fund between state and local government councils. Sometimes, fund allocated to local government councils are diverted by state government to other projects or not released to the councils concerned, especially if council opposition political party controls the council. This action often leaves the councils with poor financial base leading to conflicts. Sometimes, the Federal government can also withhold funds meant to local government councils for political reasons as was witnessed between the federal government and Lagos state government during Obasanjo's regime (2003 – 2007).

One major area of conflict is the situation where the political office holders refuse or feel reluctant to approve proposals and measures towards improving the welfare of the career staff especially with respect to salary increases, regular payment of salary, promotion, in-service training, and approval of application for seminar/workshop attendance among others. That is, conflicts can arise if the collective interests of the workers are neglected. Certain issues that affect the career of local government workers could bring about conflicts. Issues such as lack of promotion, delays in the payment of salaries, poor remuneration and conditions of service could trigger conflicts between the local government union and local government councils.

In local government system, grievances among individuals cannot be under-estimated. In management – labor relations,

lack of communication over issues and absence of effective organization frame works to handle grievances bring about conflicts. Once there is no trust and information is often distorted, there is bound to be conflict. Conflicts can also arise between councilors and the chairmen of local government. Causes of these conflicts may be as a result of favoritisms or marginalization in decision-making, inequity in remuneration of political office holders. Conflict may rise because of unhealthy rivalry or power tussle over implementation of some policies and programmers by the career civil servants. Industrial Relation is a consultative stage of the public personnel process. It is a tripartite relationship between employers, trade union (workers) and the government. Labor relation revolves on the employer and employees in the negotiations process, while the government provides supervisory role. Government's role in industrial relation is to provide enabling environment for the practice of industrial relations. Industrial relation practice requires conformity to rules and regulations. It is the responsibility of the human resources department to manage industrial conflict at work. In the local government system as in most organization, human groupings make up all work activities. Local government workers often demand for improved conditions of services. They often complain of poor salaries and wages, while the management of local government councils could not meet up with these demands. This often results in conflict resulting in strikes by workers.

Towards a Healthy Relationship: In any establishment, it has been recognized that problems of remuneration, conditions of employment, role, grievance and interference among others, if not resolved do degenerate to conflict. Conflicts can also arise if the collective interests of the workers are neglected. Certain issues that affect the career of local government workers could bring about conflicts. Issues such as lack of promotion, poor remuneration and conditions of service could trigger conflicts between the local government union and local government councils. Conflicts are managed at the shop and national levels in local government administration.

At the shop floor, the consultation and communication that follow are the responsibilities of the Head of Personnel management Department at the local government level and National Union of Local Government Employees (NULGE) official in each local unit. Prior to meeting the personnel manager, NULGE officials summon all staff of local government meetings intermittently to appraise the policies or decisions as they affect their welfare. At the National level, Nigerian Labor Congress (NLC) for junior staff and Trade Union Congress (TUC) for senior staff, Employers' Association and Government consult on wages and salaries of workers. However, negotiation often takes place between National Union of Local Government Employees (NULGE), Employers' Association and Government for service to be in parity with that of civil service. Issues of a general character affecting the whole service are dealt with in the Unified Negotiating

Machinery. This machinery is used for negotiation and consultation. These two approaches form the platform of machinery for managing conflict in local government administration. It is against this background that we now specify and prescribe the following a guidelines regulating the relationship between political office holders and permanent local government staff. The guidelines however recognize the fact which Adebayo (1981) stressed and it is to the effect that a sharp dichotomy between politics and administration in impractical and unrealistic. The essence of the guidelines therefore is to allow the officials to perform their jobs in an environment free from the evil influence (or blight) of political meddling and partisan politics (Table 2). The guidelines provided below are adapted from the work of Augustus Adebayo (1981).

S/N	Political Office Holders	Career Local Government Staff
1	Establish objectives programmers and plans	Provide necessary advice and information, to help political office holders establish such objectives and plans.
2	Review periodically the progress, performance and direction of such objectives, programmers and plans	Carry out day-to-day (routine) implementation of such established tasks.
3	Exercise ultimate power, direction and control of established tasks.	Exercise power over minor and routine decisions and actions on settled or approved policy (established task).
4	Determine the general guidelines to actions arising out of some particular problems	Identify peculiar problems arising out of settled or approved policy and bring such cases to the attention of policy makers (political office holders).

Table 2: Principles and Practice of Public Administration in Nigeria, New York: John Wiley and Sons (Adebayo, 1981).

Onigu-Otite and Albert (1999) in a pictogram adds that the usefulness of the debate examined above lies in the fact that there is need to prevent an unhealthy interference of politicians in the implementation of public policies and at the same time make career administrators realize that politicians as representatives of the people, have the constitutional duty of ensuring that career administrators are made accountable to the people.

The debate highlights the fact that since people do not elect career administrators, they are servants who should execute faithfully the policies made by the people; they are servants who should execute faithfully the policies made by the people's representatives. Furthermore, the debate emphasizes the fact that there is need to specify or allocate

function to both political office holders and career administrators in a manner that there is no over-lapping and conflicting spheres of authority (Fig 1).

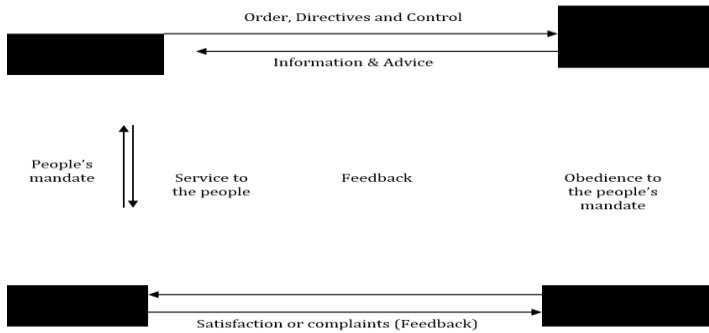


Fig 1: A model of healthy relationship between political office holders and career officials.

CONCLUSION

From all we have said so far, certain conclusions can be made. First, political office holders are no doubt the masters of career public servants. However, in executing their authority as the superiors of permanent officials, they have to follow the established rules of conduct such as the constitution, civil service rules, guidelines regulating local government administration and any other established traditions that are not illegal.

As masters over permanent officials, they are to issue orders and directions while the permanent officials are to obey. On the other hand, permanent officials are to offer advice, information and useful guides, which are necessary for sound policy formulation by the political office holders. This function has to be discharged with a good sense of judgment, tact, modesty and professional dexterity.

Political office holders on their part should be humble enough to accept that the constraints of time, knowledge, experience and partisanship often make it impossible for them to adopt rational policies. This therefore requires that they should listen to the advice given to them by the permanent officials.

Under such situation, the career officials would recognize and accept the powers and authority of their political masters while on the other such political masters recognize and accept the professional competence of their career officials. This provides the healthy environment for a harmonious working relationship between political office holders and permanent local government staff. The model of a healthy working relationship is presented below as a conclusion. The

application of this model will help to improve relations and reduce frictions in the new millennium.

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