



THE CHALLENGES OF PARTICIPATIVE MANAGEMENT IN PUBLIC ORGANIZATIONS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Participative management is the process of allowing the employees and their representatives the opportunity of taking part in the decision making process of their organization. When this is done, it will help to enhance better working condition, improve organizational decision making mechanism and as well encourage a harmonious working relationship between the employer and employees. This paper therefore examined some of the factors which hinder employees' participation in decision making. Data was generated through secondary sources and it was discovered that factors such as authoritarian character of managers, negative attitude of the organizational structure in Nigeria, attitude of Nigerian government, Nigeria environment and rigidity of some managers constrains employee participation in decision making in Nigeria and this hinders organizational growth. The paper concluded by suggesting that the subordinates should be involved in the decision making process in public organizations in Nigeria so as to enhance organizational growth.

KEYWORDS: Participative Management, Decision Making, Public Organization.

1. INTRODUCTION

The process of decision making in any human organization involves the process by which some individuals takes action either to approve, modify or reject a preferred position on a particular issue or groups of issues. It also involves the art of day to day decision that is used in the management of any organization so as to achieve its goals. Before any decision is taken in any organization, proposals may be rejected, others accepted while some are modified. This therefore implies that the survival of any organization depends to a large extent on the ability of the management to take decisions that will enhance the achievement of its goals. The attainment of organizational objective in today's complex organization demands that the employer would expect that the employees perform their duties with all seriousness in order to accomplish organizational goals.

With the ever increasing recognition that employees often have something valuable to contribute apart from the accepted unit of day to day activities, many organizations involves the employees in the decision making process. According to Gollan and Wilkinson (2007) Kim, Macduffie and Phil (2010), Bhuiyan (2010) and Brown (1982) the idea of allowing the employees to take part in taking decisions that effects them will not only help to boost the morale of the workers but will help in no small way to enhance their productivity which will in turn lead to organizational growth. Involving the employees in decision making process is seen as a managerial technique which helps in improving organizational

productivity by striving for the shared goals of employees and managers, Ojokuku and Sayujigbe (2014). To them, organization can achieve this by allowing the workers to make input in developing mission statement, establishing policies and procedures, determination of wages promotion etc. Employee participating in decision making refers to the process of allowing employees and their representatives opportunities to collaborate in matters that concern the management of their organization especially where the employees are directly involved.

To Franca and Pahor (2014) Employee participation in decision making positively affects the working environment, while Rothman and Rothman (2010) opined that employees are more likely to experience physical emotional or psychological discomfort if they are not engaged in their work roles. They argued that employee's engagement to their work roles typifies a positive attitude which an employee holds towards an organization. However when an employee hold a negative disposition of his or her working environment, there is the tendency of such employee manifesting signs of displeasure and this impacts negatively on both the employee and the organization. The end result of the above is that such employee will rather look for job elsewhere or may intentionally begin to avoid work but on the other hand, employees who are happy with their work always have a stable mental and physical health and as such the employee will be committed to their assigned duties.

According to Owolab, and Abdul- Hameed (2011) in order to increase the workers commitment and humanize the work place with the intention of improving work performance and good citizenship behavior, managers need to permit a high degree of employee involvement in decision making. Also in the opinion of Noah (2008) employee participation in decision making helps the employees have a sense of belonging as well as a congenial environment in which both the management and the workers voluntarily contribute to healthy industrial relations. However, the institutionalization of the employee participation within the nation's industrial relation system according to Ojokuku and Sajuyigbe (2014) was championed by scholars such as Adewumi, 1997, Fashoyin (1992) and Imaga (1994) who opined that employees participation in management decision making will help in small way in reducing industrial conflict in public organizations in Nigeria, help to enhance employee productivity, rapid grievance procedure and as well motivate them .Despite the numerous benefits of employee participation in decision making, yet there are plethora of challenges. It is on this premise that this paper is set out to examine the impact of these challenges on both the employee and the organization with a view to suggesting practical solution.

2. CONCEPTUALIZING PARTICIPATIVE MANAGEMENT

The concept of participative management according to stander (1992) is a dynamic process of mutual decision making and creative problem solving through active participation of the employees with the distribution of authority and shared accountability. Every employee in any public organization desires to be treated as partners and colleagues and as a result their participation in decision making process should be all inclusive rather than being exclusive. The practice of allowing employees to participate in taking decision requires restructuring the entire organization to enable decision making and problem solving and shared governance at all levels. This process entails the delegation of decision making authority and power, responsibility and shared accountability.

According to Beach (1995) participative management is the process by which people contribute ideas toward the solution of the problems affecting the organization and their job. He however argued that participative management does not only include the physical contribution of the individual but that it also includes his, intellectual and emotional involvement in managing the affairs of the organization. Indeed, Ogunna (2007) posited that participative management makes an organizational decision making more rational and objective as people of different ideas, attitudes, and values contribute to organizations decision making apparatus. To him, he maintained that involving the employees in decision making process helps in no small in increasing the rate of communication flow in the organization which helps to resolve numerous management problems. Also Hughes, Avey and Norman (2008) were of the view that participative management which entails involving the employees in decision making process enhances organizational growth while on the other hand Isabirye (2007) opined that organization could through participative management become a world class organization by improving work performance and productivity.

Busek, knudsen, and Lind (2010) argued that the benefit of involving employees in the decision making in organization is not just rooted in the job the individual performs in the organization but also in other activities in the organization through their unions. Without involving the employees in making decisions, they are likely to misunderstand organizational policies

and see them as management's policies and as such the employees will devise ways of sabotaging organizations policies but when the employees are actively involved, that will promote better understanding between the workers and their management. This according to Swansburg (1993) will help to build trust, informed commitment, goals objectives, and autonomy. The employees are therefore trusted to make decisions facilitated by adequate teaching and enablement.

Participative management helps to ensure a conducive working environment and as well allows for optimal use of employees abilities without relinquishing authority and responsibility of management. However, Emmanuel, Chux, Charles (2014) argued that participative management in public organizations has numerous benefits for both the employers and the employees as it serves as an acknowledgement of the vital roles employees play in any organization and a recognition of their economic rights. It also serves as an extension of democratic principles in an organization where employees exercise greater influence over decision that affect their lives. It helps to reduce turnover, absenteeism, reduce grievances and as well encourage a more cooperative relationship between the employers and the employees. It also contributes to greater trust and a sense of control on the part of the employees.

Also, it provides employees the opportunity to use their private information which can lead to better decisions for the organization. Nevertheless Dublin (1974) posited that when employees takes part in the decision making process in the organization, the number of supervisors needed in running the affairs of the organization would be reduced as the employees will on their own show a high sense of responsibility in the discharge of their day to day activities and will be ever ready at all times to accept the authority of their supervisors. In this situation therefore, the employees instill on themselves that self control, help in supervising the work of their colleagues and will not at any time cause problem. He concluded by saying that participative management increases the positive responses of the subordinates to management direction. According to Ogunna (1979) when employees participate in decision making in any organization, it will help them examine the problems that would be involved in policy implementation, help to determine the best alternative of a policy which can be implemented with minimal cost. It ensures effective implementation of plans which enhances organizational growths.

3. VARIOUS WAYS EMPLOYEES PARTICIPATE IN DECISION MAKING PROCESS IN PUBLIC ORGANIZATIONS IN NIGERIA INCLUDES THE FOLLOWING

3.1. Individual participation

This is a situation where a boss may seek the opinion of his subordinates over issues affecting the organization. In the same way the subordinate may initiate actions on behalf of his boss which he/she may likely put forward for discussion with the boss for necessary actions to be taken. It is possible that during the course of the discussions that the subordinates may get his supervisor exchange views on a new policies and programme of the organization. The subordinates contributes in the decision making process by sharing ideas, views, opinions and suggestions that will be helpful for the growth of the organization in an unscheduled or irregular intervals or it can even be on daily basis.

3.2. Labour Union Participation

This is the process in which the employees in any public organization in Nigeria participate in the decision making process of their organization through their elected representatives known as their union. This is one of the reasons why it is advisable for employees in any organization to join unions because it is only through the unions that they would be carried along. There are various ways by which the union, in conjunction with the leaders takes part in decision making in the organization. This is achieved when the Union leader's holds regular consultations with the members which will help them articulate all their needs and interest for onward discussion with the government. Also, the union leaders in consultation with the members makes public statements over the policies and actions of the management of their organization for better performance that will enhance organizational growth. The Union through their elected representatives participates directly in the management of their organization.

3.3. Consultative participation

The consultative participation process of decision making is a situation where the manager convenes a meeting of his subordinates for the main purpose of sharing ideas and suggestions in order to find solution to organizational problems. It will be stated here that seeking the opinion of the subordinates does not in any way transfer the decision making authority

and power of the manager to the subordinates but rather the opinion of the subordinates will guide the manager in taking final decisions on issues affecting the organization. The final decision making power still resides with the manager. This is just like the saying goes that two good heads are better than one. The manager still reserves the right to either accept or reject the opinion of the subordinates. The manager by accepting the suggestions of the subordinates is one way of showing them that he values collective judgment and it helps them have self confidence and trust.

3.4. Democratic supervision

This is a situation where the manager calls for a meeting of the subordinates as a group to participate in the decision making process regarding operating problems of the organization but only acts as the chairman that directs the course of the discussion, in stimulating, guiding and controlling the process thereby making sure that the final decision is reached through consensus. While serving as the chairman of the group discussion, he tries as much as possible in reconciling all conflicting ideas towards reaching a consensus.

According to Ogunna (2007) the manager under this process of decision making leads his subordinates through persuasion, manipulation, teleguided understanding, magnanimity and group consensus rather than coercion and command. For the subordinates to participate meaningfully in this process, they must be adequately informed so as to contribute effectively in the group discussion. More importantly, this process succeeds where the organization is being managed by managers who possess democratic leadership style.

3.5 Union/Management Participation

This entails the process by which the union and the management cooperate with a view to finding a joint solution to problems affecting the organization. This is normally achieved through the means of joint union-management committees which exists at different levels of the organization. Any decisions reached by these committees are transmitted to the management for acceptance or rejection or modification which helps in finding lasting solution to organizational problems. For this process of decision making to be effective, there must be a spirit of give and take, cooperation, compromise and the readiness of the management to accept objective views and suggestion from the union members.

4. CHALLENGES OF PARTICIPATIVE MANAGEMENT IN PUBLIC ORGANIZATIONS

The effective participation of workers in the decision making process in public organizations in Nigeria is hindered by a lot of challenges which includes thus:

- ❖ **Authoritarian character of Managers:** This is a situation where some managers in some public organization see themselves as demi-Gods as they possess absolute powers to manage their employees as passive groups. These kinds of managers see themselves as being above the people they lead. To this caliber of managers, the only language they understand is command and coercion which they use to subdue and intimidate the workers who always work under fear. They therefore do not believe in seeking the consent and opinion of the subordinates in any issue concerning how the organization is managed and this therefore hinders effective participation of the subordinates in taking major decisions that will affect them in their working environment.
- ❖ **Negative Attitude of the workers:** Negative attitude being exhibited by Nigerian workers hinders them from effectively participating in the decision making process. Poor attitude to work such as high rate of absenteeism, dereliction of duty corruption, insubordination, truancy, poor awareness among others are some of the barriers to participative management. This is because for the subordinate, to participate in decision making, they must possess the basic knowledge and experience on issues they have to deal with. However, it has been observed that majority of the Nigerian workers lack the interest and enthusiasm to take part in decision making in their organization. Also Ogunna (2007) lamented that many workers do not participate in decision making process because of lack of basic orientation and knowledge that would enable them do so. This is majorly because of the notion that workers in Nigeria see government business as nobody's business.
- ❖ **Organizational Structure:** The structure of public organizations in Nigeria is such that the manager or supervisor is vested with the power to command and control his subordinates. It is the responsibility of the manager or supervisor to make decisions regarding how the employees are to be rewarded, promoted, punished, appraised, trained etc. this therefore, instills psychological fear on the employees. With this, the workers always speak less in

front of the manager talkless of criticizing him. The relationship between the manager and the subordinates in the Nigerian public sector is that of master-servant relationship. It is very difficult in Nigeria for the workers to feel free in discussing any problem affecting the organization with the boss as partners in progress.

- ❖ Also, the effective participation of the subordinates in decision making is constrained because both the norms, values, policies and procedures of public organization in Nigeria are imposed on the organization to only ensure compliance. However, the organizational policies as handed down to the workers to only implement usually provides for what can be said or done, when and how without the participation of the employees who exists only to implement the policies without their input.
- ❖ **Negative attitude of Government:** The negative attitude of government towards employee participation in decision making in public organizations in Nigeria is a very great challenge towards employee participation. This is because government and its agencies in Nigeria do not see anything good in allowing the workers take part in decision making process. Government in Nigeria always assume to have known all the problems of the people and as such they see workers who wish to participate in decision making as trouble makers and hence engage in intimidation of workers. Also some managers in public organizations are power drunk, they feel that by involving the employees in decision making process, the workers will no longer accord them respect. Also part of the reason for the failure of organizational management to allow workers to participate in decision making is that some managers may feel that their subordinates might make better and informed contribution than them and as such the top management will no longer value and cherish them.
- ❖ **Rigidity of most managers:** Some managers in public organization are always too rigid in their policies and actions and are not amenable to organizational changes. This rigidity on the part of the managers do not provide an enabling environment for the worker to participate in taking decision in the organizations. This attitude is common with some managers that are incompetent and for fear of being exposed by some subordinates that are well experienced. This is very possible because both qualified and unqualified employees are allowed to remain in public organizations as against what is obtainable in private sector.
- ❖ **The Nigeria Environment:** The environmental condition in Nigeria poses a great challenge to employees participation in decision making process. The Nigerian society is such that majority of the populace have little or no knowledge of the fundamental rights, where the rights of the people are being trampled upon by the government that is supposed to protect these rights, where there is total violation of the principles of rule of law which is one of the cardinal principles of democratic governance. Also the Nigeria society is where the social and economic gap between the haves and have not is too wide and it continues to widen. This makes the rich to become richer while the poor become poorer. According to beach (1995) Nigeria environment is one of the underdeveloped nations where physical survival occupies about 100% of the average individuals time and as such he has no energy left for ego-satisfying drives for instance the participation of people in the decision making process.

5. CONCLUSION

Having examined some of the challenges to participative management and its implication for organizational growth, it was discovered that participative management is very vital for organizational effectiveness and high productivity of public organization in Nigeria. This is because when the subordinates are given the opportunity to participate in decision making process, it will help to enhance better working condition, improved organizational decision making, encourage employee satisfaction, harmonious working relationship between labor and management and at the same time enhance overall organizational growth.

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