

Outsourcing and Efficiency of Nigerian Public Administration

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Abstract: *The confidence reposed on Public Administration as the apparatus through which government at all levels improve the living standard of the people through the various processes that ensure that policies, programmes, purposes and goals of government are realized, has been jeopardized by red tape, slowness, paternalism, resources wastages, and a greater focus on processes and procedures rather than results that characterized the traditional Public Administration in the 70s. However, attempts to remedy the trend, gave rise to Public Management era that focused on the application of management principles, including efficiency in utilization of resources, emphasized effectiveness, customer orientation, reliance on market forces, and greater sensitivity to public needs. The era of Public management also paved way for the New Public Management (NPM) epoch that not only sustained the trends of Public Management era but also emphasized outcome-oriented partnerships between the public and the private sector to provide services to citizens efficiently. Among the main principles of the NPM is the introduction of “outsourcing” as a business that facilitates organizational efficiency. Implicit in the above assertion is that outsourcing is positioned as a strategy that has the capacity to ensure efficiency of Public Administration in Nigeria. Data for the study were generated from the secondary sources. The study is equally x-traded on resources based view theory whose key theorists includes Jay B. Barney, George S. Day, Gary Hamel, Shelby D. Hunt, G. Hooley and C.K. Prahalad. This paper found that Outsourcing makes for Efficiency in Nigerian Public Administration through cost saving; enhanced productivity and increased profitability and outsourcing in Nigerian Public Administration is internally opposed.*

Keywords: *Outsourcing, Public Administration, Public Organizations, Efficiency. RBV.*

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I. Introduction

The quest for efficiency in the Nigerian Public administration has led to many reforms. Whatever may have driven the reforms be it technological, political and administrative, etc, management of Public administrations are expected to have metamorphosed from regulatory and reactive into strategic and proactive (Sally, 2007). Of course, the Public Administration of contemporary times cannot do without being strategic and proactive as public needs are rapidly changing and societies becoming more diverse, complex and fragmented. Technological advanced and more knowledgeable citizenry creates new opportunities and expectations, thus, the pace of change is faster than ever necessitating the adoption of outsourcing (World Bank 2001, in Sally 2007).

Semantically, outsourcing is a practice used by different organizations to reduce costs by transferring portions of work to outside suppliers rather than executing it internally. It is an effective cost-saving strategy when used properly. This is because it is sometimes more affordable to procure goods/services from other organizations than providing the goods/services internally. The concept of outsourcing can also be seen as the procurement of services from sources that are external to the organization (Rundquist, 2006). In this regard, an organization can delegates part of its in-house operations to a third party with the third party gaining full control over that operation/process of rendering the services that were hitherto provided internally (Ono & Stango, 2005).

While the benefits of outsourcing have always been tilted around cost saving, organizations can employ this strategy to focus on core aspects of a business to achieve efficiency. In this regard, outsourcing non-core activities of an organization usually improve efficiency and productivity because another firm performs these smaller tasks better than the organization itself. This strategy may also lead to faster turnaround times, increased competitiveness within an industry and the cutting of overall operational costs.

Indeed, organizations can reduce labour costs significantly by outsourcing certain tasks, while having simultaneous access to technology without investing large amounts of money to own the technology. Thus,

many businesses find outsourcing the functions of human resources, such as payroll and health insurance, security, environmental sanitation etc to save enormous amounts of time, effort and energy and at the same time concentrate on the core activities of the Organization. It is important to emphasize that Human Resource is one of the noncore functions of a firm; other companies may have experts to help with this aspect of human capital.

As a strategy, Olalekan; Omirin; & Osagie (2011), noted that outsourcing is not limited to a particular sector of the economy but covers a whole spectrum of human endeavour, hence there are different opportunities for outsourcing (Jones, 2009; Jayatilaka & Hirscheim, 2009). Outsourcing has even taken international dimensions as companies are now leaving their shores for other countries to seek best performance with a view to ensuring best quality at a cheaper cost (Hameri & Tunkelo, 2009). Recent economic trends have triggered outsourcing as some schools of thought feel outsourcing is desired to reduce cost. However, to some scholars, outsourcing enhances value (Elmuti, 2004). Thus, outsourcing is not necessarily for cost reduction.

Based on the fact that outsourcing is not only for cost reduction, management of public services often requires separation of core activities from key support services. For instance, because government is responsible for governance, it should not be distracted with unnecessary activities such as waste management. It is in this regard that outsourcing has become trendy in Nigeria. This “outsourcing” in vogue trend is not just in Nigeria, as Mirko & Dalibor (2011), relying on a rough estimate, asserts that the amount of outsourcing projects in the Slovenian public sector have doubled in recent years and during the present economic and financial crisis, reach tens of millions of Euros and that outsourcing projects ought to reduce costs and help organizations to focus on core business processes which should consequently improve service provision and quality. Past experience and recent research carried out in the public sector show that outsourcing can indisputably bring many benefits to the organizations which master the art of devising, deploying, and maintaining outsourcing relationships.

According to Muweesi (2011) the growing interest in outsourcing over the years from western to eastern countries and later to the African countries and especially in Nigeria is due to the benefits associated with it. Given the diverse nature of business processes a large scale organization has to manage today, it is nearly impossible for the organization to manage all of its processes efficiently by solely depending on its own expertise (Al-Shalabi, Omat and Runquist 2007). Even if it is visible, there is a tendency for organization to lose its focus and efficiency; the two core drive of outsourcing. Hence, outsourcing some or all of non-core business processes of an organization make for a focus on the core activities (activities in which the firm is more competent) rather than services that fall outside its expertise. This will not only improve function effectiveness and flexibility by accessing a support network with highly qualified and specialized workforce but help Organizations control their costs and business risk (Bathelemy & Adsit 2003).

However, despite the obvious fact that public administration can benefit from outsourcing, many public organizations in Nigeria have not queued firmly into outsourcing perhaps because they have not realized the benefits of outsourcing that ensures effective and efficient service delivery.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Thus, the thrust of this paper is to ascertain how outsourcing ensures the efficiency of Nigerian Public Administration; identify the challenges of outsourcing in Nigerian Public Administration; and proffer ways of ensuring minimizing those challenges outsourcing.

RESEARCH PROCEDURE

This paper made use of secondary data. This was obtained through the review of relevant literature or use of materials from text books, website pages, journals, government publications/documents, workshop papers, seminars/conferences and official reports on outsourcing as an efficiency measure for Nigerian public administration. Bulk of the internet sources were accessed using the Google search engines. The content analysis was used to analyze the data.

II. Conceptualizing The Key Concepts

In this study, certain concepts form the hub of the discourse and because concepts are more comprehensible when operationalised, concepts such as Public Administration, outsourcing and efficiency is defined within the scope of this study. The essence is to ensure enhanced comprehensibility.

i. **Outsourcing.** This means having an arrangement with external firm to take up an aspect of large organization’s activities on their behalf. Some scholars use the term “contracting out” to explain outsourcing. Using University of Nigeria Nsukka for an instance, the institution gave out their sanitation task to a firm called Total Facility Management, a firm in charge of keeping the University’s environment clean. This was a responsibility hitherto handled internally. Again, the school also gave out their transcript services to a firm called i-transcript. I-transcript is now in charge of processing transcript requests and sending processed transcripts to the applicants. Also her online platforms are handled by TENECE; a giant ICT consulting firm.

ii. **Public Administration.** By Public administration, we mean the various public organizations that execute the policies of government in ensuring the welfare or wellbeing of the citizens. Such organizations may include the Public/General Hospitals, the Public Schools (Universities, Polytechnics, Colleges of Education and even Primary and Secondary Schools), Prisons, Road Management and Road Safety Agencies, Water Corporation, Aviation Management, Traffic Management, Waste Management, Law Enforcement Agencies and Tax Collection. When we say government, the state and local government are inclusive. Because these organizations solve the problems of the general public on behalf of the government, they are called Public administration.

iii. **Efficiency.** The concept of efficiency is associated with cost-saving. It is strategy driven by the need to cut waste of time, energy and resources in contemporary public administration. It is imperative in the Nigerian public administration because of the high degree of resource wastage in our system. Hence efficiency is concerned with the ability to deliver service with less cost and achieve the desired impact on the people. It talks about reducing cost of running government establishment hitherto circumnavigated and circumscribed by wastage.

III. Empirical Review Of Related Literature

A study conducted by Mirko Vintar & Dalibor Stanimirovic in 2011 titled “Evaluation of impact of outsourcing on efficiency of public sector organizations”, was focused on in-depth analysis of the essential factors within the concept while examining the current situation in the field of outsourcing in the Slovenian public sector. The article analyzes the methodological, substantive, procedural and other relevant factors within the process of outsourcing and provided guidelines for quality selection as well as effective and efficient implementation of outsourcing projects in the public sector. The study documented that on a rough estimate, the amount of outsourcing projects in the Slovenian public sector have doubled in recent years and during the present economic and financial crisis, reach tens of millions of Euros. The drive is based on the belief that outsourcing projects tend to reduce costs and help organizations to focus on core business processes which should consequently improve service provision and quality. Past experience and recent research carried out in the public sector show that outsourcing brings many benefits to the organizations which master the art of devising, deploying, and maintaining outsourcing relationships, but for many organizations, these benefits remain elusive. Note that what Mirko and Dalibor referred to as Public Sector is what this study refers to as Public Administration.

Another study conducted by Muweesi Charles in 2011 on “the effect of outsourcing on organizational performance in private organizations in Uganda using the Uganda Telecommunication limited as a case, revealed that outsourcing contributed to cost efficiency. The study established that outsourcing also contributed to improved productivity as well as to profitability. The study concluded that outsourcing positively affects Performance in Uganda Telecommunication Limited and thus recommended that outsourcing be improved in order to improve on cost efficiency, productivity and profitability. Although this study was on the private sector, it was found vital for this study as the New Public Management that introduced outsourcing in the Public Sector has the sole ambition of making the public sector business oriented. Thus, its conclusion can very well apply to the Nigerian Public Administration.

Another study by Catherine Magelssen; Fernando Sanchez & Fariborz Damanpour in 2015 titled “learning from outsourcing: the effects of outsourcing strategy on organizational efficiency” examined the effects of three dimensions of outsourcing strategy—depth, breadth, and dynamics—on organizational efficiency. The study found evidence that over time the outsourcing dimensions affect organizational learning differently. The results suggest that repeated experience from deep outsourcing strategies and the diversity of knowledge gained through broad outsourcing strategies are important for learning to be more efficient. In contrast, the study did not find learning effects from dynamic outsourcing strategies. The study discussed the implications of these findings for theory and research on organization-level boundary choices over time, having stated that theories of firm boundaries and empirical research on the consequences of boundary choices typically focus on the transaction or capability level. Studies of organization-level governance strategies to tease out how organizations learn from their boundary choices over time to develop capabilities for enhancing performance are scarce. This study was important to our study as it studies the effect of outsourcing on organizational performance, irrespective of the type, hence the findings make meaningful contributions to this research study.

A study by Işık Çiçek & Bilal Özer (2011) on “the effect of Outsourcing Human Resource on Organizational Performance” espoused that the improvement that high organizational performance provides is becoming more critical in today’s increasing conditions of competition. The effects of human resource functions and organizational culture to perform a significant organizational efficiency attract both theoreticians’ and practitioners’ interest much more. When outsourcing is considered as one of the methods that organizations utilize for strengthening their core competencies to allocate their resources efficiently, the question of the degree to which human resource functions could be outsourced brings in mind the effect of organizational culture

enabling outsourcing on organizational performance. Besides performing the administrative services such as catering, cleaning, employee transportation, and security as outsourcing, operations of some human resource practices like training and payroll via outsourcing contribute the desired performance positively by means of only true strategy and organizational culture shaping the strategy. The performance of human resource management and the viewpoints of employees about outsourcing have critical importance to improve a convenient strategy. In this literature research, what kind of human resource practices can be outsourced and can add value to organizational performance are discussed. The influence of workers' changing attitudes about outsourcing towards organization in detail and the effect of organizational culture in the mentioned relationships are missing in the literature. While this study lacks empirical factors, however, the essence of its review is to asset that however we outsource, it deals mainly on the human resources of the organization. By implication, no outsourcing decision goes without recourse to the human capital of the organization.

Asiamah Yeboah in 2013 studied "the relationship between outsourcing and organizational performance" and revealed that there is no statistically significant correlation between outsourcing and organizational productivity, there is statistically significant correlation between outsourcing and quality, there is statistically significant correlation between outsourcing and competitive advantage, hence it recommended thorough background check before outsourcing, and organizations must also have a back-up system to avoid losing vital data as a result of incompetence on the part of the external supplier. Just like the study of Mirko & Dalibor who studied the impact of outsourcing on Slovenian Public Sector, Asiamah studied the impact of Outsourcing on the public sector of Ghana. Both studies rendered comparative insight into the effect of outsourcing on public administration and their findings are quite revealing and informative to our study.

In the study by Ofoegbu; Onodugo & Onwumere in 2015 on "Public Sector Reforms and Outsourcing Services in Nigeria, the authors did an empirical evaluation of the performance of the Nigerian public sector outsourcing activities in order to ascertain the extent to which pre-determined objectives of the exercise has been achieved. Findings show that outsourcing has a positive impact on quality and the effectiveness of service delivery of the affected government activities. However, the study did not find evidence of cost reduction, accountability and transparency in the outsourcing initiative. This study suggests a review of the outsourcing policy to ensure beneficial improvement in cost reduction while maintaining the quality of service, having asserted that the global economic recession forced many nations to seek for cost-efficient means of providing public services. One tool that was readily embraced by most countries including Nigeria is outsourcing. Since the advent of outsourcing of public services in Nigeria in 2004 as a strategic tool for public sector reform, it has not been subjected to systematic evaluation. This study is just apt and self explaining, giving deep insight into the expected outcome of this study.

Again, the study conducted by Bosa Ifeoma in 2015, titled "Outsourcing of Solid Waste Management to Private Agencies in Anambra State; A Case of Laga (2009-2013)" examined the effectiveness of "outsourcing" solid waste management to private agencies in Anambra state. It sought to ascertain the extent of improvement in solid waste management in Anambra state since it was outsourced to a private firm; identify challenges of the private firm in keeping Anambra clean; and proffer solutions to them. Based on the hypotheses, several findings were made, even though significant improvement has been recorded in Solid waste management in Anambra since outsourcing to LAGA International Ltd, solid waste management in Anambra state is not yet a haven, hence there are still lapses. On the basis of the above findings, an integrated management approach was recommended as the panacea to the challenges that has bedeviled the efforts of Laga International Limited in keeping Anambra state clean. Bosa took a swipe from the mainstream discourse and got particular on waste management, a public administration responsibility however in a state. The findings are applicable to any other kind of government ministry, department or agencies.

IV. Theoretical Framework of Analysis

This study is x-rayed on the Resource Based View (RBV) of the firm. The resource-based view theory is of the opinion that organizations must develop unique, firm-specific core competencies that will allow them to outperform competitors by doing things differently (Prahalad and Hamel 1991). In the resource-based view, strategists select the strategy or competitive position that best exploits the internal resources and capabilities relative to external opportunities. Key theorists who have contributed to the development of a coherent body of literature of RBV includes Jay B. Barney, George S. Day, Gary Hamel, Shelby D. Hunt, G. Hooley and C.K. Prahalad. Jay Barney's article, "Firm Resources and Sustained Competitive Advantage" (1991), is seen as pivotal in the emergence of the resource-based view (Prahalad and Hamel 1991). Barney stated that for resources to hold potential as sources of sustainable competitive advantage, they should be valuable, rare, imperfectly imitable and not substitutable (Barney, 1991).

The Resource-based view of the firm theory suggests that organization should formulate internal strategy to gain competitive strategy from its internal resources. It infers that the core premise of resources based theory is that resources and capabilities can vary significantly across firms and that those differences can

be stabilized by contracting out those activities that does not form part of the core activities of the organization to outside providers who have competitive advantage perhaps because they it is part of their core activities (Barney and Hersterly 1996). By implication, the resource based view in outsourcing builds from a position that an organization that lacks valuable, rare, and inimitable and organized resources and capabilities shall seek for an external provider in other to overcome that weakness (Peruvonic and Pedersen, 2007).

This explains the link between resource-based view of the firm to the resource dependency theory that Bosa (2015) talked about when citing Pfeffer and Salanick (1987) who asserts that firms do not have all the resources they need and therefore, depend on their environment for some resources. By implication, a firm's strategic options were determined to a great extent by the environment. Since firms were dependent on the environment for resources, they needed to enact strategies that would allow them to acquire these resources. Therefore, the external environment had already been determined for these firms, and they experienced little strategic choice. However, those who supported the notion of managerial choice argued that some organizations were more effective than others in the same environments, thus proving that strategic choice did exist.

To this end, with the RBV theory this paper asserts that to ensure the efficiency of Nigerian Public Administration, the organizations must develop unique, firm-specific core competencies that will allow them to outperform competitors by doing things differently, while contracting out those activities that it does not have the resources to provide to external providers while concentrating on the activities it has the core competencies to accomplish efficiency.

V. Findings And Discussions

From the literature, outsourcing has positive effect on organizational performance, by implication on public administration but has challenges and most importantly has not been embraced by many organizations. Specifically, literature showed that outsourcing breeds efficiency, productivity and profitability. It also has challenges. Thus, these findings are discussed:

1. Outsourcing makes for Efficiency in Nigerian Public Administration through Cost efficiency, enhanced productivity and profitability

Organizations tend to outsource when it is believed that certain support functions can be completed faster, cheaper, or better by an outside organization (Barthelemy & Adsit, 2003). Tasks that are not core competencies of the organization are candidates for being contracted out. However, any skill or knowledge that allows an organization to serve its customer base better, that deals directly with the product or service it is trying to put out of the door, is one that must remain in-house. Cost efficiency remains the primary explanation for the development of outsourcing. Firms evaluate outsourcing to determine if current operation costs can be reduced and if saved resources can be reinvested in processes that are more competitive. Some researchers contend that an important source of cost reductions is the outsourcing firm's access to economies of scale and the unique expertise that a large outsourcing vendor can deliver, all of which in turn will serve to boost the Organizational performance (Bin, 2004).

Of course, in the University of Nigeria where Total Facility Management (TFM) is in charge of keeping the University environment clean, thereby saving the university the stress and cost of ensuring cleanliness in the university instead of concentrating on teaching, research and fundamental administration. Again, the advent of I-transcript; an ICT firm that is in charge of online processes of students' transcript and delivery them to their destinations in good time. They have allowed the student's records unit of the register department ample time to concentrate on other core tasks while they engage transcript. of course, their services are saving UNN alumni time and unnecessary cost of coming to UNN to apply for transcript and sometimes coming back to collect them and sending same to the destinations.

The use of University of Nigeria Nsukka is just for emphasis sake because today, most public universities Nigeria are outsourcing some of its operations which before now were part of the traditional functions that supported academic activities, hence global competitiveness is not limited to private sector since public institutions like Universities and polytechnics are becoming more pronounced in the universities and polytechnics as well as other public organizations. Aside the global competitiveness, the need to improve service delivery in the public sectors at a lesser cost has made outsourcing an unavoidable phenomenon for organizational efficiency (Ikeije & Nwaoma, 2015).

2. Outsourcing in Nigerian Public Administration is internally opposed and Challenged:

Although outsourcing has been adjudged an efficiency criteria for public organizations in Nigeria, especially on the basis of the benefits it provides to public organizations, especially in the area of budget control, concentration on core tasks, use of specialized personnel, internal resource availability, it is not without challenges. Some of these challenges, according to Ikeije and Uwaoma (2015) have come from resistance by the affected workers whose condition of services has changed. There is also the threat by the host community whose members are affected by outsourcing policies. In addition, the integration of these external services

providers into the public organization culture and the failure to institutionalize efficient and effective regulatory mechanism pose a challenge to the public administration. The first and second challenges of outsources policies are reminiscent of what happened in the University of Nigeria Nsukka during the Bartho Okolo administration when (he) the Bartho Okolo, being the Vice Chancellor opted to outsource security services in the University for more efficiency and when he introduced ICT in the administration of the university. In the case of making the University administration ICT compliant, many workers of the university whose jobs seem to be affected by the policy highly opposed the policy. Again, the Nsukka community threatened the university administration as it was obvious that the outsourcing of the security will adversely and very significantly affect their people who have about 70 percent of the staff of the security department. This situation according to Ikejie and Uwaoma (2015) also applied to Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike which had desired to outsource its security functions as the security unit is adjudged highly inefficient, but the management feared the sociological implication of disengaging existing staff that are predominantly from the host community as it would likely posed security threat in the environment in the long run. The third strand of challenges- that of interfacing the external staff who lacks knowledge of the organization culture and whose allegiance does not rest with the public organization, may lead to release of official information that may cause the organization much damage.

VI. Recommended Policy Options To Upturn The Challenges Of Outsourcing In Nigeria Public Organizations

1. Re-absorbing the staff of the unit slated for outsourcing into the organization, especially when it is whole outsourcing. This option is considered eloquent though the issue of overstaffing may arise, which will take the organization just a year to balance when some of their staff may have retired. The essence is to ensure that the staff of the unit to be outsourced who is already conversant with the culture of the organization will be a better fit into the organizational scheme of thing. More so, letting him or her off the job because the outsourcing scheme will turn him into the enemy of the organization regardless of the disengagement package given to him or her. Whereas the discontentment may not arise immediately due to the disengagement package, after the funds paid to him/her has vanished (as expected due to lack of plans for such eventuality because of the kind of job security that federal government jobs offers), the individual will forget the handsome disengagement packaged squashed and animosity against the organization will start building. Sometimes, this may lead to security challenges for the organization.
2. Giving higher consideration to bidders for the outsourcing from the host community whose workforce has the possibility of being most of the members of the host community but under the direct control of their own, over other bidders from outside the host community who may come with staff from outside the community where the organization is situated. This condition will checkmate against the animosity and security challenges discussed above.
3. Training and retraining of the staff of the outsourced units to intimate them of the culture of the organization. This is very important so that they will not in any way act contrary to the culture of the organization were they are vendoring their services. This will penultimately help the actualization of the goal of outsourcing- efficiency and effectiveness.
4. Establishment of a detailed checklist to serve as efficient and effective regulatory mechanism for the outsourcing firms is apt so as to check against the usual inefficiency that trails public organizations due to their inability to institutionalize efficient and effective regulatory mechanism.

VII. Conclusion

It is concluded from the discourse in this paper that outsourcing is indeed, an efficiency criterion for public administration, especially as Nigeria as a country have engaged outsourcing which was successful in the form of privatization of telecommunications. Indeed, various state and local government have engaged in one form of outsourcing or the other especially in the area of waste management and tax collection. However, while outsourcing has been eulogized as efficiency strategy, caution is required by public organization management to avert the dangers or challenges that come with outsourcing as it is a known fact that whatever has advantages also has disadvantage. Therefore, we make bold to state that outsourcing also has several disadvantages. For instance, signing contracts with other companies may take time and extra effort from a firm's legal team. Security threats occur if another party has access to a company's confidential information and then the party suffers a data breach. A lack of communication between the company and the outsourced provider may occur, which could delay the completion of projects, and of course the threat that emanates from the host communities and the existing staff whose jobs will be affected by outsourcing policy.

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