New approaches of reform, innovation and modernization of public service and state institutions

Exchange of knowledge, experiences and prospects

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Reform Implementation as Complex Process: Perspectives on & for Reform Management in the African Public Services

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Abstract

Africa’s experience with Public Sector Management (PSM) has been uneven: Just 29 percent of the completed interactions, and 45 percent of those still ongoing, were rated “unsatisfactory” in the OED review. In retrospect, the reasons why so many technically based reform projects are doomed to fail are clear. There is no adequate attention yet on the implementation of reforms as a complex issue which requires the management of many variables. Launching computerization programmes, functional audits, or other technical inputs within a context where they enjoy little support from political leadership, and where they are radically at variance with informal “rules of the game”, therefore, in the long run, will not yield sustainable results. Even in those cases where leaders wanted reform, they and the donors consistently underestimated the magnitude of the challenges involved at the political, managerial and technical levels. The paper examines the complexity of moving from conception to implementation of reforms as intrinsically fundamental to what reform is all about.

Introduction

The history of public administration from Weber to the NPM is emblematic of not only the dynamic evolution of the idea of administering the vast public sector which represents the development of the human individuals in the society. More importantly, this history is also the history of which idea about the management of the public sector has worked, which has failed, and the complexity involved in the gap between failure and success. The difference between success and failure, for some public sector managers, could be as a result of some inflexibility in management approaches to the complexities generated by their departments. For some others, it is the inability to match accountability to implementation plan, or generate a strong connection between conception and reality. For yet others, the real problem is their helplessness in the face of disruptive change that calls for ingenious managerial skills. This difficulties, if not handled competently, spells a certain death for the progress of not only the public services but also of the departments in charge as well as the national economy. This is because the public sector would have failed in the face of the complexity of interpreting the government’s development plans into concrete digestible forms that improve the lives of the citizens.

This paper attempts to critically examine the strategies and mechanisms for conducting complex but executable reform programmes, especially within the context of African public services, with the Nigerian experience interrogated to illustrate a typical African reform implementation dynamics as a complex process. It revolves around a very fundamental question: How can the public service in Africa successfully interrogate the complexity of reform management in the service of executable programmes? The essay is premised on the fact that there has been no dearth of reform programmes on the continent. However, there are a lot of lamentable stories about how and why this and that reform efforts have failed to yield the projected objectives. The thesis of this essay is that while most reform programmes have been captivated by the capacity building/service delivery mantra, the devil really is in the execution of the programmes. It is the nexus between strategy and vision on the one hand and the status quo, the attitude of the core stakeholders as a cultural imperative, the capacity issues and the critical implementation landmines and incentives that enables the developmental state and its desire to transform the lives of the citizens through good governance, on the other.
The essay therefore, based on the analysis of reform complexity from the perspective of chaos theory and system analysis, discusses the need to annex reform management not just to any particular model for taming reform complexity, but rather to a multiple perspective that respect the inherent uncertainty of reform dynamics. The essay is, in view of this, divided into five sections, apart from the introduction. In the first one, we examine the complexity that has attended getting innovative ideas into a strategic synergy with existing institutional framework on the continent. It particularly highlights what I call the “paradox of reform dynamism” in which there is no isomorphic relationship between the enthusiasm about reform initiatives and the will to execute in the face of reform complexity. Section two attempts to clarify the continental predicament with reform management using the Nigerian experience. This section specifically analysed the career of the various reform efforts in Nigeria and the peculiarity of their performance. In section three, we took a theoretical excursus through the fundamentals of chaos theory and its implication for the interrogation of reform complexity. We also analysed several perspectives for understanding the dynamics of reform complexity. This is to ground our claim that while these perspectives give us an insight on the complexity of reforms management, their mono-causal analysis is less effective as an understanding and resolution of reform complexity than a multifactorial analysis championed by system thinking.

In view of this analysis, we then examined, in section four, several approaches for deepening the strategies for managing reforms, especially from the perspective of the reform process highlighted in the World Bank “Public Sector Governance Reform Cycle”. Section five deals with those dangers to watch out for in entrenching reform as well as the success factor which could establish the gains of those reforms successfully implemented. Finally, in the conclusion, in pointed attention to some issues that should engage our attention beyond this significant conference.

**Contextualising Reforms Complexities in Africa**

The current global discourse on public administration tend to interrogate the viability of the pervasive sharing and learning from best and smart practices and innovation which can drive the development of the public sector as well as enhance its capacity to execute the policies that can deliver social goods to the citizens. (Schick, op. cit.). In other words, scholars have been concerned with how the public service can function “in the development process as a rule-bound, impersonal, but dominant organisation, the primary function of which was to shape the direction of society” (Olaopa, 2009a: xix), in view of the challenges that the adoption of models like NPM et al pose for public service modernization. The idea of best practices, of innovations and of reforms all point to the phenomenon of change in the society and the necessity of responding to them especially within the topology of delivering the public interest as concretely as possible.

When we combine the idea of innovation and best practices with reforms we get closer to the complexity of repositioning the public service for better service delivery. Simply put, reform implies getting innovative ideas into a strategic synergy with the existing institutional framework. Thus, the idea of reform “enables humans to accommodate new changes by adjusting or changing old ideas or processes in line with new challenges or visions” (Ibid.: 2). Such reforms could therefore either be forward looking or backward looking. They are forward looking when they attempt a repositioning of an institution to meet the challenges of the future. They are backward looking when they attempt the same repositioning to adapt to an ideal conceived in the past. Olaopa argues that
it is important to note here that these two senses [of reform] are applicable to the issues of public sector reforms in Africa. On the one hand, the public sector in most African countries, as a result of various causes, derailed from the path of professionalisation after independence. Thus, there is the need to reposition the public sector in the continent on the path of professionalisation. On the other hand, it is also necessary to position the public sector in Africa to meet the challenges posed to it by the contemporary environment—national, regional, global—in which it operates (Ibid.: 18).

This quotation has one simple but significant implication: the African public service is placed in an extremely important and strategic position to appropriate the best practices the world has to offer in the pursuit of a lasting reformation of the public service through executable initiative efforts for the postcolonial challenges in Africa. The real problem however is that while the public service in the non-African societies are actually playing significant role in the resuscitation of the state as the facilitator of development, the African public services are still trapped in what we can call the “paradox of reform dynamism,” a situation in which the public sector is locked into the necessity of reform initiatives without the appropriate enthusiasm to truly understand, adapt, and execute the intended reform in the pursuit of good governance and better service delivery.

The fundamental issue, at this juncture, therefore, is not of conceiving and adapting reform initiatives within the necessity of global reform thinking. Rather, the issue is whether the state is able to push the idea behind the reform through its often complex and messy implementation. This is because “the thinking, learning and changing that propel reforms are…not often linear” (Ibid.: 21). Thus, there is usually the conception-reality gap in the implementation effort channeled into reform initiatives on the continent. Bossidy and Charan (2002) read this gap as that of the execution of reforms. This is not to say that African states lack an execution schedule for their reform programmes. Rather, these reform efforts fail because the idea and architecture of reform execution are misconceived. More often than not, execution is reduced to tactics and operational strategies. The failure, according to them, to realise that execution, within the ambit of reform complexity, is both a system and a discipline, raises a fundamental problem for the African public service.

It is within this context, therefore, that Prof. Adebayo Adedeji asks the critical question of whether the public service in Africa possesses the professional, technical and ethical capacity to cope with the complexities of formulating, planning and executing reforms (Adedeji, 2004: 3). This question is meaningful within the evolution of the chequered history of development plans on the continent, starting with the beautifully conceived Lagos Plan of Action (LPA) to the recent NEPAD.

Scholars have identified three waves in the evolution of the public service in Africa. These three waves were supposed to highlight the progression of reform thinking from independence till date. However, they paradoxically also demonstrate the difficulties the African public service has had to contend with in adapting to the necessity of repositioning and innovativeness in response to both national and global reform initiatives. Kithinji Kiragu (2002) argues that while the idea of reform in Africa is not an altogether new concept in the management of the public service, it became accentuated with the coming of the civil service reform agenda associated with the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP) in Africa in the 1980s.
The immediate post-independence period in Africa served as an eye-opener to the complexity of transiting from the colonial to a postcolonial public administration framework. On the eve of independence, there were attempts by the colonial powers to reform the public service in the colonies especially through the active promotion of “African visibility” in public administration. However, it was really an attempt that was really too little too late. The administrative framework still retained the colonial structure which was basically hierarchical, and thus not all that conducive to “bold and forthright administration, unchained by precedent and willing (ness) to experiment” (Adedeji, 2004: 4). Furthermore, the hierarchical framework also generated a discriminatory class structure that distinguished between an elite cadre and a lower, non-pensionable cadre. This situation raised the concern of the national leaders, and led to the desire to transform the public service in the recently independent African states.

However, according to Kiragu, in most states like Tanzania, Kenya, Zambia, and so on, the overhaul of the public service was tied to the ideological precepts of national liberation. For instance, the Africanisation policy was a major and significant plank in the nationalist’s movement to independence. Yet, it did not succeed as a means of transforming the colonial structure of the public service. For one, the African leadership could not protect the civil service administration from the patrimonial character of the state. After riding to “flag independence” on the basis of the mobilisation of the African masses, and the promise of a better life for them immediately the colonialists left, the African nationalists subsequently failed to concretise their promise of transforming the lives of the masses through, for instance, the enabling of the civil service structure for better service delivery.

This failure is largely due to the inability of African leadership to transform the nationalist passion to deconstruct the colonial inherited bureaucracy to secure a truly developmental state adjusted to the African reality and the requirement for good governance. This inherited bureaucratic framework, partial to the Weberian centralisation, submerges African communalism and its subsidiarity principles in the alien bureaucratic framework. Following from this is the creation of what Teresa Turner calls the “statist comprador” amongst the bureaucratic elite operating a complex web of wheeling-dealing relationships between them and the political elites on the one hand and the bureaucratic elite and foreign business interests on the other. This inevitably created a serious hindrance to the expansion of indigenous capital and entrepreneurship that is in sharp contrast to the logic of productive capitalism that promotes genuine reform in the West. In the sense in which this bureaucratic logic operates in Africa, it leads to a disconnection of wealth creation from productivity as “class relations at bottom, are determined by relations of power and not production” (Richard Sklar)

This eventually led to the bloated and de-professionalised character with which the African public service confronted the post-independent challenges. Kiragu therefore argues that:

Public administrations in Africa were thus ill-disposed to cope with the onset of the economic crisis associated with the trebling of international oil prices and the general collapse in prices of most other commodities exported by the non-oil producing countries in the first half of the 1970s…. [Thus] there followed a decade of general decline in the public service of most African countries, especially in terms of poor pay, and worsening capacity and performance. Yet, the comparatively large sizes of these services and their
claims on the public purse were a major contributor to the fiscal deficits and macro-economic instabilities in these countries (2002: 3)

Given this dynamics of non-performance within the evolving complexities of global processes, reform took on a new twist defined by the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs). Before considering the phases of reform effort in Africa, we should first note two templates that conditioned the structural complexity of public service reforms in Africa. Prof. Adedeji notes pertinently that one of the many tragedies of postcolonial Africa is that the African public service has never been deconstructed after the many decades of independence. Such a deconstruction and subsequent reconstitution must however be within the local trajectories of the African history and culture (2002: 5, 12).

The first template, mentioned earlier, arises from the uncritical engrafting of the Weberian framework unto the critical African predicament. It has been alleged that the Weberian bureaucratic paradigm—as on administrative doctrine—engendered a bureaucratic political imperative which has contributed to the evolution of underdevelopment in Africa. Specifically, the argument is that

… the Weberian rule-bound rigid bureaucratic system is found to be incompatible with the many faceted complex tasks of socioeconomic development. Bureaucratic obsession with rules engenders inability to cope with the changing conditions in developing nations (Naidu, 2006: 86).

This bureaucratic model can therefore be seen as a disemboweled and disenabled one without the capacity to instigate the required transition from underdevelopment to industrial transformation in Africa. The second template that conditioned the structural complexity of reform in the African public service is caused, according to Adedeji, by “the system of responsible ministerial government being grafted to the firmly-rooted colonial departmental structure” (2004: 5). In other words, there was an inherent structural conflict between the British departmental line-type organisation of the public service (based on a hierarchical devolution of authority) and the American staff and line bureaucratic pattern (based on the principle of work specialisation and professionalism).

With these complexities of repositioning in place, the reform through the SAPs initiatives met the post-independence African public service without what we can call the base fundamentals—i.e. a strong national perception of administrative direction—to articulate and execute complex reform initiatives. This explains the critical difficulties most African states experienced from the first wave of public service reform (PSR) in the 1980s through the second wave in the 1990s to the evolving third wave in the 2000s. It was therefore possible that some of the structural ingredients of the first wave i.e. downsizing conflicted with the goals of capacity building. Furthermore, the capacity building response to this structural reform failure in itself was grossly inadequate to facilitate the ultimate goal of effective service delivery in the pursuit of good governance. The take off of the third wave of PSR in response to the imperative of delivering the social goods also had to adapt to the evolving market economies, the NPM and the intricate complexity of a private sector initiatives to service delivery in the public sector. While this appears to be the new mode of thinking about changes in the public service in Africa, Kiragu cautions that
…these changes are premature. The operating environment does not offer significant autonomy for the managers for decision-making, which is still very much centralised on such basic operational aspects as human resources management, and financial controls are not yet enabling. Also, the incentives framework for both the organisations and the individual managers are not in place. Furthermore, the impact of all these on service delivery may be long in coming (Kiragu, 2002: 9).

Let us now examine the peculiar manifestation of the complexity of reform management within the context of Nigeria.

Reform Implementation and Its Complexity: The Nigerian Experience

The specific case of Nigerian provides a concrete manifestation of these reform dynamics. In this case, the growth dynamics of the public service was short-circuited by a number of events. First, the oil revenue wind fall and the adoption of the state-led development strategy in the 1970s inspired huge public sector investment and institutional expansion. With this development and the vigorous competition among agencies for managerial talents, officers with proven capacities were picked and catapulted overnight into higher positions. Promotions were unusually rapid with those promoted lacking sufficient experience to complement their sudden status. The overall consequence was not just weak performance, but the break-down of the principle of “treasury control” of establishment that used to be so strongly reinforced by the organization and methods (O&M) system.

The 1974 Udoji Reform programme was suitably placed to create a viable basis for the most desired managerial revolution that the selective deployment of the NPM techniques would have afforded the Nigerian public services in the 1980s. Yet, two strong hindrances deprive Nigeria the foundation of true reform. When the Udoji Commission was inaugurated in 1972, it came face to face with two contradictory impulses in the public service tradition at the time. The first was the revolution then championed by the Fulton Committee in 1968 which decried the “generalist” convention of the British Civil Service, as well as the incapability of the “amateurish” Civil Service in dealing with the problem of an increasingly complex and technologically advanced society” (Olaopa, 2009b: 134). The Fulton Committee therefore recommended a necessary move away from the extant administrative culture to the idea of managerialism. On the other hand, the Second National Development Plan, inaugurated in 1970, was also already underway. Its underlying philosophy was that of getting the Federal Government to assume the commanding height of the national economy in the quest for development (Olaopa, 1997: 188).

The Udoji Commission defined its responsibility as that of “articulating the public service’s expanding functions, and responsibilities and the requirements ‘for it to become a more effective tool to achieve results in [its] newer, more demanding roles as agents for development’” (Ibid.: 135). When the Udoji Report was published, it revealed a manifest approval of the Fulton Report in its recommendation of “a new style of public service” coupled to a results-oriented management system operated not by generalists but specialists and professionals. Its recommendation of the Project Management approach with emphasis on the definition of managerial responsibility in terms of expected results also put it in conflict with the strict hierarchical and bureaucratic framework of the Second National Development Plan.
This “discrepancy” in the Udoji Report led to the Federal Government’s biased implementation of its recommendation in favour of the wage component and the indigenization policy and wage-based compensation. The Federal Government had to demonstrate its new found power, a la the “Commanding Height Thesis”, to utilise national economic plan as a means for engineering national transformation. Furthermore, the oil boom phenomenon also strengthened the government’s attachment to the wage compensation dimension of the Udoji Report to the exclusion of the other fundamental components. These two factors combined to delink the wages in Nigeria irredeemably from the productivity improvement benchmarks in the national economy. The foundation of true reform was therefore lost.

The rejection of the Udoji Report also coincided with the power game played out in the immediate post-Civil War period. This was the period when The Gowon Administration had to contend with the task of building a solid basis for policy-making and for fostering political legitimacy within the ambit of political and administrative inexperience. The civil servants thus found themselves at the helm of the management of the affairs of the country, and probably outplayed their hands with their fortunate visibility in national politics. This arrogant “political visibility” became a sin that must be punished after the military coup of 1975 that brought Murtala and Obasanjo to power. The punishment came in the form of the decapitation of the top echelon of the civil service establishment. The command structure of the military took its toll on the rigorous investment analysis and the process of plan implementation which were the hallmark of the Nigerian Civil Service then.

The lesson to learn from the Udoji issue is however significant: By rejecting the import of the Udoji Reform for laying the foundation of managerial efficiency in the Nigerian public service. The wage compensation without the accompanying managerial framework neglects the full import of the implementation message behind the managerial revolution and its implication for reform management in a developing country like Nigeria. This is the true message of the execution framework championed by Bossidy and Charan. In Execution (2002), the authors argue that execution is the heart of reform management. Execution, as different from operational strategies, is systematic process which takes a comprehensive view of reform management including the complexity—internal and external—involved in it. According to them,

Execution is a systematic process of rigorously discussing hows and whats, questioning, tenaciously following through, and ensuring accountability. It includes making assumption about the business environment, assessing the organization’s capabilities, linking strategy to operations and the people who are going to implement the strategy, synchronizing those people and their various disciplines, and linking rewards to outcomes (2002: 22).

Bossidy and Charan also make a crucial point that sheds light on the Udoji situation and put it in the right perspective. They specifically argue that execution must be embedded in a reward system and in the norms of behaviour that everyone practices (Ibid.: 30). The catch however is that the reward system is part of the comprehensive execution package; it fails if taken out of context. To get at the core of the execution culture, there must be a constant attempt at “exposing reality and acting on it” (Ibid.: 22). While the Udoji Report forced reality into the analysis of the Nigerian public service, the Federal Government did not face that reality well.
On its own, the Phillips Reform of 1988 also suffered from a conception-reality gap defined by executability of reform programmes. This is manifested, for example, in its strange conception of professionalism in terms of the location of an officer within the service structure (Olaopa, 2009b: 138). This was facilitated by the provision which mandated the decentralization of personnel management to line ministries. This, according to the elements of the reform, was to ensure that the “professionals” acquire life-long expertise in the business of that ministry. However, this idea was inherently flawed. One, it assumes that professionals were the only relevant element of the public service, to the exclusion of administrators, politicians and scientists. Two, the reform scheme essentially led to the erosion of the professional cadre through skill depletion in the absence of regular training programmes. Again, the implementation of the 1988 Civil Service Reform failed to genuinely manoeuvre through the complexity of the administrative and political environment of the Nigerian public service.

The Udoji and Phillip Reforms marked the commencement of the structural dysfunction of the public service in Nigeria. The command and control orientation of the military eroded the institutional capacity of the public service to respond to the challenge of national economic growth. Good governance inevitably suffered in the atmosphere of normlessness and unaccountability. Professional posting, for instance, became a means for servicing political patronage. The overall neglect of the civil service sapped it of the requisite capacity to respond to modernising impulses. Most importantly, “policy-making/analysis and consultation, which moderate the design of implementation strategies and the conduct of monitoring and evaluation, broke down along with the institutional capacity to develop cross-sectoral linkages of investment and expansion” (Olaopa, 2009b: 142). Reform management therefore became caught up in the programme of results-with-immediate-effect framework which the pure antithesis of sequenced effort.

The 1995 Ayida Reform was equally conceived in this debilitating political condition with the mandate of restructuring the civil service to restore its lost glory. It was also supposed to “reinvent those factors that facilitated its effective performance” (Ibid.: 140). However, the Reform had the inglorious achievement of returning the public service to the pre-1988 traditional framework of “a non-professionally oriented new generation of civil servants already infected by deep systemic crisis of a collapsed educational system and an undemocratic military tradition.” The Reform package therefore refused to take into cognizance the “benefit of new thinking on public sector management reform as a global phenomenon” (Ibid.: 141).

These reform initiatives therefore were unable to make the significant impact for them to engineer the desired managerial revolution in the Nigerian public service. The consequence was the diffusion of focus of agencies functions and the role of the stage in development programme since the mid-1980s. This has led to the winding up of national sense of priorities and the overcrowding of the administrative system. When fiscal crisis set-in in the late 1980s, deep structural issues had built up to create distortion in the size, skills and structure of the service and its overall capacity to self-adjust and to deliver services. Besides, while the tradition of symbiosis among different sectors as basis for policy intelligence was eroded, the sheer size and structure of the government had outgrown its capacity for policy making as well as programme and project implementation.

We can now begin to achieve the theoretical understanding of the complexity involved in reform implementation within the context of the failures of reform regimes in the African public service.
Perspectives for Understanding Reform Dynamics and Complex System

The nature of reform is such that it is a constant which is complex and complexified. This derives from the dynamism immanent in the changing nature of the needs and values of human societies. Reforms at the institutional and organisational levels are induced by the need to adapt to changes which are necessitated by national, regional and global conditions. Reform, therefore, derives its meaning from reflective learning and innovativeness of managers to know whether their system is working well or badly, to diagnose the causes of both systematically as basis for designing reform strategies and actions that will produce desired changes in performance. This dynamics is driven by two mutually reinforcing processes. The first is making sense of one’s daily practice and work and, the second, preconceiving the system of which they are a part, in new ways.

Reform, in its administrative sense, is not a self-adjusting response to fluctuating systemic conditions, which Caiden (1968) refers to as administrative change. Rather, and in a more fundamental sense, it represents a malfunctioning in the self-adjusting processes of administrative changes. Reform therefore points to a need to “form again” which entails either readjusting an institution to meet an original conception after some period of decay and decline or repositioning the institution in order to be better able to meet future challenges. In both sense, reform is aimed at repositioning the organisation in order to be able to effectively and efficiently meet the dynamism and challenges of its universe of operation. Within the Nigerian context, reform is conceived as “the process of aligning public service structures, systems and processes, human and material resources to government policies, targets and plans” under the justification that it is always only possible to determine the configurations of the public sector organisations from the nature of the comprehensive plans they exist to implement (Olaopa, 2009b: 55).

The need for reform derives from the acute dissatisfaction of the citizens with the performance of the government and its apparatuses. The public sector, in particular, was not able to perform adequately due to “accumulation of excessive power, lack of accountability and representation, indifference towards public needs and demands, official secrecy and inaccessibility, and role in depoliticizing the public sphere” (Haque, cited in Ayee, 2008: 1). The rationale for this is that since the taxpayers’ money goes into the running of these institutions for socio-economic development, it is only rational to ask that they produce efficient and effective results, especially given the competition from the private sector. Innovation in the public sector is therefore meant to meet the challenge of efficient service delivery that will improve the receptiveness of this sector to public expectations. Response to such challenges will then excite questions like: “What features of our current structures, cultures, systems, processes or skill-sets, etc get in the way of what we are trying to achieve” or “What sort of strategy do we need to take advantage of in order to be able to exploit our existing strengths and opportunities”. The case for this efficiency in service delivery is even more crucial in the African public service. In most African states...

...there is an over-reliance on natural resources. [In Nigeria, for instance], since the discovery of oil, the diversification of the economy has suffered. Consequently, the creativity that would have promoted the flourishing of other sectors of the economy has suffered.... The shift in focus later resulted in the near-total neglect of the agricultural and other sectors whose activities would have been the best vehicles for technological development (Olaopa, 2009a: 14-15).
If reform therefore requires justification which challenges us to inquire into the framework for implementing reforms to energise good government, what understanding of reform management will enable us deal with the gap between our vision and its reality? I suggest that the adaptation of reform management into the context of chaos theory will provide useful insight into the management of reform dynamics, especially in a developing context like Nigeria.

**Complexity and Chaos Theory**

The whole reform process presumes a process that connects individuals to an action which, in turn, is linked to an outcome. In reality however, reform is far from being a linear or proportionate process. It is in reality much more complex and messier. In other words, because the casual relationship of sub-systems are usually complex, as there are no single or predictable set of cause for system’s dysfunction, there are hardly simple formula or strategy for their resolution or for easy control to alter the behaviours of management systems. For instance, according to Louise White (1994: 151), reform implementation programme are usually conducted within increasingly indeterminate and complex knowledge and technological age dynamics that usually resist our best desires to understand them or shape them exactly to our purposes.

It would therefore not be out of place to understand reform more by placing it in the framework of chaos. Chaos theory began as an attempt, in physics and mathematics, to understand and deal with the structure of turbulence and “the self-similar form of fractal geometry.” In other words, chaos theory deals with unpredictable complex systems like the global weather, mountainous landscapes, cardiac pattern, hurricanes, friction, water turbulence, financial markets, etc. These chaotic systems obey rules that are so sensitive that small initial changes and perturbations can cause unexpected final result. The “chaos” is thus a reference to the unpredictable and random changes occurring as a result of the system’s extreme sensitivity to minute differences in initial conditions. It is thus theoretically possible, for instance, that a slight rise in temperature in the ocean off the coast of, say, Peru will create tiny changes in the air flow that would eventually lead to different weather in North America and Europe. In most cases the slight change would make no difference whatsoever, but when the system is unpredictable at a certain stage, the future may unfold quite differently, depending upon what little difference occurred.

When applied to management thinking, chaos theory depicts organisations and institutions as complex and unpredictable systems, like those found in nature, with different stages of stability and chaos due to the relations among their constituent parts. Thus, as non-linear dynamic systems, organisations and institutions also display the four characteristics of the natural chaotic systems. The first is sensitivity to initial conditions. This manifest as the random and unpredictable way a system reacts to different variables. If a system like an institution is complex, experimenting with the same or slightly different variables will not achieve the same outcome. The second feature is that of time irreversibility. This alludes to the Heraclitean principle that one cannot step into the same river twice, in organisational terms. This means that there is never the same context twice: Even if an institution possesses an identical personnel and similar characteristics with other institutions, it will never perform exactly the same as those other similar institutions or itself. Thus, a strategy will never perform the same way in the same institution or in two different ones.
The third feature refers to what is called strange attractors. These can be likened to those sets of values which can act as “island of stability” for an organisation. These “attractors” have the capacity to alter the behaviour of an organisation over time depending on which economic, social, technological, political or social factor is driving the system at a particular time. The fourth feature is called bifurcation. This refers to the sudden but creative appearance of qualitatively different solutions to the equation of a non-linear system as a parameter is varied. Thus, as complexity increases in an institution, two different patterns can emerge to address an issue differently.

Given this nature of organisational complexity, a manager is not expected to attempt to control an organisation; rather, s/he ought to be prompted to take advantage of the organisation’s complexity. So, how does management manage organisational chaos, complexity, and uncertainty? As Dennard (1996) said: “What good is a science of chaos, if it doesn't tell us how to overcome chaos and complexity? Isn't that what management is about?” (p. 495). In the final analysis, this is precisely the most important question. Thus, how do we undercut complexity to increase performance?

Complexity in reform management revolves around the messy and uncertain relationship between the “internal subsystems” and the “external suprasystem” of an organisation. The internal subsystem involves a cluttered mix of the product and technical subsystem, the structural subsystem, the psychosocial subsystem, the managerial subsystem, and the cultural/value subsystem. These, in turn, find themselves in a messier and tangled relationship with the external suprasystem consisting of variables like economy, politics, technology, demographics, law, education, natural resources, culture and globalisation. Reform management and implementation must therefore seek a profitable advantage out of this complex but unpredictable web of interlocking systems. How then do we interrogate these “messy mix” in such as to produce a viable diagnostic tool that will ensure a near smooth strategic drive from the conception of reform to its profitable implementation? This is fundamental because, for Kanter

Innovation is back at the top of the corporate agenda. Never a fad, but always in or out of fashion, innovation gets rediscovered as a growth enabler every half-dozen years (about the length of a managerial generation). Too often, however, grand declarations about innovation are followed by mediocre execution that produces anemic results, and innovation groups are quietly disbanded in cost-cutting drives. Each generation embarks on the same enthusiastic quest for the next new thing and faces the same challenge of overcoming innovation stiflers (Kanter, 2009: 69. my emphasis.).

The Reengineering Perspective

Several models and perspectives have been generated on managing the complexities generated by reform management. A popular perspective comes from the reengineering school. This school favours a non-system method of achieving process efficiency. Within this perspective, organisational malfunction and diagnosis is read in terms of structural and technological deficiency which requires the understanding of the nature of the organisation (Ziegenfuss, 2002: 22). This school is represented by Hammer and Champy’s popular Reengineering the Corporation (1993) which focused on the product manufacturing and delivery processes of private companies. However, in spite of the gains of this perspective in managing process efficiency, there was really no real prospect for transforming the organisation through reform management. There is one fundamental reason for this:
Ziegenfuss argues that such a non-system model appears too narrow to capture the multidimensional complexity of reform management. Champy, in *Reengineering Management* (1995) admits as much when he notes the crucial dimension of the managerial system in reform diagnosis. Thus, a non-system perspective preclude the much broader perspective—like the system and the chaos models—which which expands the diagnostic targets from the start (Ziegenfuss, 2002: 22).

**The Core Competency Perspective**

The core competency school—pioneered by Prahalad and Hamel—champions the idea of rethinking reform management through a strategic architecture that promotes core competencies rather than a portfolio of businesses. The difference? A portfolio of businesses involves a public sector directing its departmental units at particular service in the economy and coaxing them to perform better and better. On the other hand, a portfolio of competencies requires that the public sector respond to the changing and complex boundaries of national, regional and global economies. To reform and perform, the public sector must therefore prove itself

...adept at inventing new markets, quickly entering emerging markets, and dramatically shifting patterns of customer choice in established markets.... The critical task for management is to create an organization capable of infusing products with irresistible functionality or, better yet, creating products that customers need but have not yet even imagined (Prahalad and Hamel, 2009: 123).

In this sense, the public service does not see itself as a collection of strategic agency units unrelated in terms of customers-citizens, distribution channels, and merchandising strategy, but a “portfolio of core competencies defined by the “company’s collective knowledge about how to coordinate diverse production skills and technologies.” This strategic architecture for reform ensures, significantly, that public sector managers do not stick to just one sacrosanct programme and framework as the one-size-fits-all for organisational complexity. Thus, for Prahalad and Hamel,

The diversified [agency] is a large tree. The trunk and major limbs are core products, the smaller branches are business units; the leaves, flowers, and fruits are end products. The root system that provides nourishment, sustenance, and stability is the core competence. You can miss the strength of competitors by looking only at their end products, in the same way you miss the strength of a tree if you look only at its leaves.... *Core competences are the collective learning in the organization, especially how to coordinate diverse production skills and integrate multiple streams of technologies* (Ibid.: 126. My emphasis.).

Can we however consider this to be an *implementable* strategy for reform management that surmounts the complexities? Michael Porter disagrees. For him, the core competencies school conflates operational effectiveness with strategy. An implementable reform management requires that we distinguish between the two. The core difficulty is that while quite a number of management tools—i.e. TQM, benchmarking, outsourcing, partnering, reengineering, change management, etc—have succeeded in achieving operational improvements for many agencies, the real issue is to translate these improvements into “sustainable profitability” (Porter, 2009: 105). Porter argues that what makes for a sustainable
reform management and performance is not operational effectiveness—which is necessary but not sufficient—but a strategic positioning which “attempts to achieve a sustainable competitive advantage by preserving what is distinctive about an agency.” [This] means performing different activities from rivals, or performing similar activities in different ways” (Ibid.: 107). This translates into a platform of “strategic agility” which allows the organisation to exploit future opportunities and respond more quickly to change.

This strategic agility sits well with Sir Michael Barber’s (2006) consideration of what he considers to be the three necessary underpinnings for reform. For him, the complex challenge of reforming the public services can be tackled through the utilisation of three significant paradigms: the command and control, the devolution and transparency, and the quasi-markets. While each of these models has its own obvious advantage, each equally works best in different context. For instance, the command and control paradigm is suitable in a context of general disillusionment with the public service which requires that the government makes a statement about reform and is seen to be serious about it.

For Barber, whatever paradigm is chosen, there are three underlying requirements which are critical to its performance. The first relates to what he calls “capability, capacity, and culture of the service in question” (2006: 7). This requirement implies that the public service must have or acquire the right skill backed by sufficient resources to get the work done. Furthermore, the kind of paradigm chosen will also determine the requisite performance mindset to be cultivated for the reform. This requirement makes it possible for the government and the public sector to become more result-oriented and less bureaucratic in order to achieve the mindset shift. The second underlying requirement is the necessity of engaging in performance management. This requires that data on performance be regularly published to enable benchmarking. This will not only allow the public officials to judge their work vis-à-vis others, it will also allow the public to understand and assess what they are paying for. The third underlying requirement addresses the complexity of reform management which needs strategic direction for maximum success. This challenge is a daunting one considering the politics attached to reform management (Ibid.: 9). Such a strategic direction therefore requires the guidance of a bold group to ensure proper and well-thought sequencing and implementation that deliver short-term results in view of the long-term goals of the reform. For John Wells, this is a good way to “deal with today’s [complexity] with tomorrow’s mind” (2003: 215).

Disruptive Innovation Perspective

A third helpful perspective in rethinking approaches to strategy design and implementation mechanism—the disruptive technologies school—is concerned about the low rate of successful reforms and innovation, and the need to effectively manage disruptive changes. What managers lack, for Christensen and Overdorf, is a “habit of thinking about their organization’s capabilities as carefully as they think about individual people’s capabilities” (2009: 8). According to this approach, if an organisation faces a complex situation, the best way to manage it is definitely not to make drastic adjustments to the existing organisation. This is because in doing so, managers end up destroying the capacities that sustains the organisation. Rather, what needed to be done is that the manager should recognise and understand the type of change and complexity that the organisation is fit and unfit to handle, and how the organisation can harness the organisation’s capabilities to tackling “disruptive innovation” and “sustaining innovation”. For Christensen and Overdorf,
research suggests that three factors affect what an organization can and cannot do: its resources, its processes, and its values. When thinking about what sorts of innovations their organization will be able to embrace, managers need to assess how each of these factors might affect their organization’s capacity to change (2009: 9).

For the authors, most managers are adept at managing sustaining innovation which involves making product and service better in ways that customers value. However, disruptive innovations create a different type of challenge. First, they create an entirely new market through the introduction of new kind of product or service which is worse judged by the performance metrics that customers value. Second, they occur so intermittently that no company has any formula for addressing them. Finally, because they promise lower profit margins and thus are not attractive to the customers, they become inconsistent with the organisation’s values. Thus, in meandering between the sustaining and disruptive innovations, managers must harness properly their organisation’s capabilities.

While all these models provide valuable perspectives on increasing performance through the successful management of reform complexity, the idea is to find a way of adapting a suitable model that will be viable in dealing with systemic complexity and uncertainty as well as enable executability. This execution culture, as we hinted earlier, becomes crucial since reform complexity usually serve as a hindrance to a result-oriented performance. Thus, for Bossidy and Charan, the execution culture is most suitable for anticipating and responding to the uncertainty of reform complexity. This is because it enables the public sector leadership to ‘design strategies that are more road map rigid paths enshrined in fat planning books. That way they can respond quickly when the unexpected happens. Then strategies are designed to be executed’ (2002: 7).

From the above, it appears difficult to achieve one model which does not have inherent shortcomings. This only reinforces the argument, forced on us by the dynamics of systemic complexity, that effective management does not derive from applying established and general prescriptive “macro-principles”. In other words, it is misleading to seek solution to a problem through a single “right” approach. A better option therefore lies in the value of a multiple perspective on the resolution of reform complexity.

More importantly, and for our purpose in this essay, this “hybrid approach” (White, 1994: 152) becomes useful if it serves as “an open-ended framework” that could lead to the generation and enrichment of diagnostic tools indispensable for the assessment and strengthening of the public sector capacity to conceive and implement reform for achieving good governance. This is crucial since the aim of reform effort in the public sector is to be able to achieve better service delivery through a profitable implementation of reform programmes.

**Critical Success Factors in Reform Management**

To ensure that these phases of the reform programmes serve the purpose for which they were designed, the perceptive reformer must constantly watch out for the critical pressure points that could make or mar the reform process. Earlier in the essay, we made a distinction between the internal subsystem and the external suprasystem of an organisation as an explanation of the nature of the complexity of reform management. That distinction is crucial because it tells us that apart from the technocratic dimension of reform which we have been considering, there is also a political dimension. Since reforms, more often than not,
involve changes in power and structures, and since the time frame for reform utility usually
do not make them conducive as electoral bargaining chips, they require a strong awareness of
the political atmosphere which is crucial for the sustenance of the reform initiatives. This
awareness of the politics of reform underscores the significant of such factors as political
support, stakeholders buy-in, communication and ownership in reform change management.

The challenge for reformers is in the need to think politically and act strategically, no
matter the circumstances. This involves striking a balance between reforms being technically
sound and being politically feasible. This is crucial in protecting reform experts from
becoming prisoners of their own enthusiasm. Of course, too much emphasis on participation
and obsession with “buy-in” can also limit reformers ability to get results. Managing the
dynamics therefore requires a good deal of skills in deploying the right political strategy that
will include coalition building.

The state has a large role to play in reform management and eventual implementation
of reform programmes. The task however would be to undermine the complexities involved in
reform management. This is important because, in the first place, the public services serve as
the connection between the government and the governed. The public sector therefore is the
locus of good governance which the government must enable in order to justify the huge tax
which the citizens pay into the government’s coffer.

Leadership sophistication is also a critical land mine to watch out for, and this will be
reflected in the quality of reform management, i.e. development of implementation plan,
assembling a team to carry out the plan and assigning of tasks to them including devising and
coordinating schedules, monitoring and generating required feedbacks. One of the common
errors in reform management is the thinking that the issue of execution can be delegated to
some group of people while the government and the public service leadership attend to some
other “important” issues. The execution of reform is an engaging and complicated task which
cannot be delegated to others. It is a system which requires the involvement of everyone from
the government to the public sector leadership to the officials. Thus, while the role of the
government in reform management may change from command to steering it definitely does
not disappear altogether (Barber, 2006: 9). It is in this sense that it is critical for the
government as well as the public service leadership to distinguish between command and
control and performance management.

This danger of delegating reform execution necessarily snowball into the pitfall of
designing reform programmes poorly and managing them ineffectively. There is really no
point in conceiving reform programmes if they cannot be carried through to implementation
to realise the vision that gave birth to them. In the face of poorly conceived strategy for
execution, the best reform idea will always fail. Two things must therefore happen in
performance management. One, there must be an adequate development of the ca
pabilities of the public sector to face the complexities of reform. Two, there must be in place sophisticated
strategic direction.

Lastly, there is the danger of not learning from past mistakes in reform management. Usually, this error is generated under the orthodox thinking that management possesses some
time-honoured principles and methodologies which are sufficient as solutions to any problem
and complexity. Within this thinking, it becomes inevitable that some prospective ideas and
strategies would be rejected as “unorthodox”. According to Kanter, “innovation involves
ideas that create the future. But the quest for innovation is doomed unless the managers who
seek it take time to learn from the past (2009: 80).
Given all that has been examined in the preceding sections, what then are the challenges of the future? How do we make reform management a continuously engaging issue especially in a developing context like ours?

Earlier on, we made a case for a hybrid model which affords us the opportunity of a multifactorial analysis of reform complexity. Such an approach, especially with regard to the executability, gives the leeway to anticipate the uncertainty inherent in reform management. This challenge of taming the reform complexity would also assist in monitoring the phases of reform management from conception to execution. In this sense, there is the need therefore for a reform diagnostics which can highlight for us the means by which we can build viable reform institutions and procedures.

**The Reform Cycle**

One such important tool for our use in this essay is called the Public Sector Governance Reform Cycle (Fig. 1). The PSGRC is fundamental to reform thinking because it assists in the identification and understanding of five crucial phases of reform. Thus, “the main purpose of the cycle is to illustrate the process that helps assess and enhance capacity to build efficient, accountable institutions—while providing tools and techniques that can be used along the way” (World Bank, 2004).

![Fig. 1](image)

Let us examine each of these phases in turn.
**Phase One: Identifying strengths and weaknesses and raising awareness.** This phase of the PSGRC involves the creation of performance indicators which can serve as the standard for measuring governance and institutions, especially across countries and over time. The World Bank, for instance, has generated an aggregate governance indicator in six areas of governance. These include: voice and external accountability, political stability and lack of violence, government effectiveness, lack of regulatory burden, rule of law, and control of corruption. These indicators raise awareness and debates, and provide insights into why previous attempts at capacity and institutional building have failed.

**Phase Two: Assessing the scope for political change and reform.** This phase allows for a country-specific assessment of the context of political reform and change through the development of assessment tools that enable practitioners to determine the scope for change and reform, identify the process and constraints that characterise change, as well as finding a local starting point conducive for action. For instance, the World Bank has developed a participatory approaches—reform readiness analyses, stakeholder assessments, beneficiary assessments—to reform assessment. These tools are based on the fundamental assumption that reform must be politically desirable, feasible and sustainable if it must have the chance of succeeding at all. The approaches therefore provide a method for identifying possible political and institutional obstacles to implementation as well as assist in assessing client commitment to specific reforms.

**Phase Three: Specifying problems and designing reforms.** This phase of the PSGRC is concerned with the attempt to develop and use analytical tools which are tailored to a country’s specific conditions, underlying problems, and reform options (World Bank, 2004). This could involve the analyses of a country budgeting systems, fiscal performance, and so on.

**Phase Four: Managing the politics of reform.** The conception and implementation of reform largely depend on the environment in which the reform is carried out. To achieve successful reform requires the promotion a participatory approach which builds coalition across different levels and stakeholders in the reform universe i.e. government, civil society, NGOs, etc. this participatory strategy will not only sustain the reform impetus, it will also strengthen the political will to improve governance (World Bank, 2004).

**Phase Five: Monitoring and evaluating results.** This phase is important because there is no point in going through the preceding phases in reform management without the expectation that they will achieve tangible and profitable results in the service of good governance. There is therefore the need for a constant monitoring and evaluation of institutional performance to ensure that goals are matched with methods and resources to produce desirable results.

**Strategy Development**

The next challenge is that of developing a strategic architecture which will facilitate reform execution. This is the whole essence of the execution revolution championed by Bossidy and Charan. The points have been made variously that managing complex reforms successfully would depend on the strength of strategic intelligence and management capacity driving the changes.
Reforms should, therefore, begin with an appreciation and development of our strength with deployment of the very best critical mass of competencies to manage the reform programmes. This is the real point of Christensen and Overdorff concerning the harnessing of the organisation’s capabilities to tackle reform complexities. This strength is what will help to develop from the scratch an integrated concept of how government currently works, a prognosis of the gaps and a strategic sense of how it should work and what strategies and mechanisms will be deployed within limitless portfolio of tools, techniques, innovations and best practices. Bossidy and Charan identify three core processes integral to strategic execution: the people process, the strategy process and the operations process. They argue that

These processes are where the things that matter about execution need to be decided. Businesses [and agencies] that execute...prosecute them with rigor, intensity, and depth. Which people will do the job, and how will they be judged and held accountable? What human, technical, production, and financial resources are needed to execute the strategy? Will the organization have the ones it needs two years out, when the strategy goes to the next level? Does the strategy deliver the earnings required for success? Can it be broken down into doable initiatives? (2002: 23).

Following this, the next step would then be to generate baseline data on pre-reform institutional quality, performance and constraints in the public service which could then be harnessed to generate some awareness and debate. This in turn will help reformers and their champions to create required urgency for the change. The first phase of the PSGRC is well adapted to this factor.

Third, because public service reform is a complex long-term process, strategic direction is a necessity. Developing a strategy is where you are going if you are to have a decent chance of getting there. Strategy development, while being an all-stakeholders responsibility, requires a small, well-qualified courageous group of majorly insiders but reinforced by critical outside expertise – a kind of “guiding coalition” that will take responsibility for designs, elaboration, sequencing and following through with reform programmes implementation, while at once ensuring required synergy and linkages that install system-wide approaches, sharing and learning. The process emphasis suggests that reforms would begin to make sense and make the desired impact when the reformers, champions and critical change drivers and those to be affected, the public officials first, are not only connected to reform action, but demonstrate an inherent collective capacity to honestly shift grounds to give way for required changes to happen. In short, if we can’t change, then our organizations will not change. (Olaopa, 2009a:19). This dimension of change belongs to the realm of the mindset that compels reformers to answer the question: “How can we in this public service notice the problem, with government help if necessary?” There must be a mindset shift among senior government officials, equivalent to that sought in the body of public servants, so that the two shifts become mutually reinforcing. Only at this point can the required culture change begin to take hold.

Four, in creating causal relationship between problems, symptoms, pressure point diagnosis and solutions in strategy design, there is the need for built-in flexibilities in the detailing of reform action plans. Such plans should take account of future needs for contingency planning occasioned by usually changing circumstances impinging on reforms. It is in this sense that Aaron Wildarsky (1973) argued that good ideas are not worth much if they cannot be implemented. Indeed, many reforms have failed not because they were not
well conceived or are not good ideas, but because, given the specific context and prevailing circumstances at the time of implementation, they just could not be implemented – strategy, action planning and implementation must recognize the current strengths of the administrative system and the political priorities of the government in power and drawing up the critical connection by designing solutions to attend to immediate priorities and short live-time of government that touches on electoral commitments before advancing to the real long-term issues at the heart of reforms. Indeed, sometimes, reformers may confront situations as it was in Ethiopia after the collapse of the Derg regime (World Bank - 76), where the state apparatus has decayed or remained undeveloped to such a degree that the immediate agenda is to address some of the most basic elements of state structure (ibid).

**Getting the Basics Right**

It is in this sense that Allen Schick’s thesis is appropriate on getting the basics rights, especially in those contexts where the conditions for desired reforms are absent. The critical emphasis is Schick’s thesis is the need to build the strengths of our public services—what we have called *base fundamentals*—before deploying best practices to ignite desired change. Thus, he advocates proper sequencing which ensures that we commence the change process by first getting the basic right before moving to rebuild taking advantage of new ideas and subsequently leveraging on what works to ignite system-wide transformation.

Consequently, reform must create the government context for agency-level systemic changes to take root. The seemingly disparate elements of a well-functioning public sector are interdependent. Taking installation of performance management system to change the business model for accountability reinforced measured results and outcomes to illustrate. The impact of contracts and such other mechanisms for fostering performance-based management depends in significant part on the policies the agencies are mandated to pursue, the mechanisms for setting target, for imposing budget discipline, for monitoring performance through the strength of the foundations of system that perform due diligence and hold the agencies accountable for their use of resources.

**Service delivery/restructuring-based reforms**

These are however one part of the story. Performance systems yield sustainable results to the extent that pay and other incentives are adequate to attract and retain the requisite staff and induce them to perform; records are maintained, and political will exists to impose financial discipline, confront tradeoffs, and adhere to a hard budget constraint. It is this difficult tension between required governance reforms, planning, budgeting, accounting, HRM, systems, processes and procedures, the policies and the governance rules, etc and performance based new business approaches by agencies’ level, that gets many reforms to be hopelessly confused and blurred in attempting to manage large agenda or many changes simultaneously.

With regards to restructuring around the “role of the state” as might be redefined to determine appropriate business models for delivering on agencies “non-core” services, leveraging private sector core competencies and mechanisms to improve service delivery, some features of a nation’s or a sector’s circumstances should determine reform induced change interventions. Some of these are one, the regulatory capacity. A government with greater technical expertise, relatively law-abiding citizenry and well functioning legal and administrative apparatus can do heavy outsourcing or harness public private partnership (PPP) approaches, as it can move easily to control the excesses of private sector service providers.
Besides, the choice of appropriate alternative service delivery (ASD) mechanisms that creates measures of public-private ownership balance will also depend on the national priority and supportive macro-economic instruments that support effort to strike a balance between efficiency (market) and equity (welfare). Indeed, the more expert, better-managed and less patronage–ridden the public service is, the less compelling the case for private sector-driven solution. Suffice it to add that the more sophisticated the customers or the public, the easier it is to rely on private markets. This perspective should serve as warning, therefore, to reformers who see the inadequacy of current public sector system, but have not analysed what will happen if for-profit private providers are contracted, and ends up driving the system to lower pre-reform performance level.

Restructuring through decentralization of managerial authorities and corporatization to give managers more “decision space” should also be pursued with caution. The case of Uganda and the Philippines is instructive here (World Bank, 2001). It shows that while decentralizing service delivery certainly offers benefits, these benefits have not always materialized. The first point to make, therefore, is that getting the centre to relinquish control does not come easy. This explains the tight constraints placed on the authority of the local government. Besides, reformers contemplating any form of decentralization whether horizontal or vertical, need to consider first how much technical and administrative capacity can be enhanced for the decentralization reform solution to make sense. Suffice it to add that technical capacity will not necessarily overcome a deficit of “social capital” which Roberts et al (2004: 233) described as “the willingness of citizens to cooperate in pursuit of their joint interest in ways that involve trust and reciprocal respect”. Besides, with decentralization, the regulatory and performance monitoring capability of central bureaucracy is also put to test.

**Instituting performance management & competency-based management culture**

Corporatization, contracting through changes in structure feature of departments to create, for example, executive agencies et al, are often discussed more in terms of legal and formal categories like “ownership” or “governance”. These do not address critical operational issues. For such restructuring to succeed in influencing performance outcomes and organizational performance, a new cadre of capable, well trained managers who have reasonable authority over financial and human resources, and are sufficiently rewarded and autonomous is required. This will reflect the depth and quality of attention that the public service in question will pay to training and capacity development of such individuals.
However, the more extensive and effective this reform strategy is, the more the need for strengthening internal and external control and regulatory mechanisms.

One real challenge for African public service reformers is that patronage, politics and unions in the governance environment may make it difficult to get critical HRM governance changes that will strengthen the hands of the empowered managers. Consequently, reformers contemplating performance-based changes like contracting, renewable tenure employment or appointment policies, corporatization and all, that creates more managerial autonomy, need to assess its political feasibility early in the reform process, to avoid wasting time and effort on an approach that cannot be implemented and if at all, just amiably.

It is in this regard that African public service reformers may wish to consider options of reforms without restructuring. In this connection, funding of programmes and projects can be tied to performance in other ways. Incentives like prices can be given to regions or agencies that do better in measured performance goals and targets. Performance reporting and league-ranking can be widely publicized to ignite national debates around critical sectors for gap analysis to inform desirable changes. Certification, efficiency or merit savings can be converted to incentive bonuses for high-performing agencies.

Within the reforms-without-structuring solution mechanism, reform to minimize the influence of patronage could entail institution of competency-based systems in selection, promotion and compensation that are indexed to skills and to performance based systems of reporting and supervision as basis for strengthening accountability in the system. Besides, certain level of training could be made a prerequisite for certain jobs, with managerial tracking system built for leadership pipelining that fast track high-performer to occupy positions to perform such jobs. The prestige of such managerial roles can be enhanced with awards and publicity efforts, including grants for officers to document their experiences and facilitated to share them in international professional seminars and conferences.

Conclusion

In concluding this essay, few questions remain to be asked on the nature and capacity of Africa’s reform management. We have not only examined the idea of reform complexity, we have also critically suggested how such complexities can be undermined to facilitate the bridging of the gap between vision and targets in the reform management of the public service. However, two questions, it seems to me, are crucial to the success we can achieve out of the analysis we presented in this paper. One, has the execution culture come of age in the public service in Africa, and specifically in Nigeria, as it has in the private sector? Two, does the African state and the public sector really have the will to go the whole span require in reform management. These questions are relevant because it would seem that the African public service is always caught up in the protracted possibility of achieving reforms by the force of the newness of reform initiatives. It is either this, or the public sector leadership and the government have a wrong idea of what implementation requires. After this important conference, I sincerely hope we can begin to truly learn what reform management entails.

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