

# THE IMPERATIVE OF “AFTER ACTION REVIEW” AS A MECHANISM FOR ENHANCING PUBLIC SERVICE PERFORMANCE AND EFFICIENCY IN NIGERIA

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## **Abstract**

In contemporary societies, delivering and maintaining public goods and services involves increased costs. As a result, questions about the performance and effectiveness of the public sector are discussed more and more often. Today, public sectors in African countries are facing challenges of improving performance and efficiency service delivery. Nigerian public sector seems not to be exempted from these maladies because the performance of Nigerian public sector has fallen short of expectations regarding the provision of services and has been identified

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with inefficiency in delivering essential services. As a result, the need for public service to improve performance and efficiency in the public sector is becoming ever greater. The article discusses the usefulness of After Action Review (AAR) as a veritable tool in improving performance and effectiveness in the public sector. This article relies on secondary sources of data collection gathered through a broad review of relevant literature on the subject through books, journals, internet materials, newspaper articles, official archives and so on. The article argues that improving the performance of the public sector must take into account the efficiency, effectiveness, financial performance, and quality of service. Since it has been difficult to build a single model that would measure the performance of public organisations, the article advocates for the implementation of After Action Review as a mechanism for enhancing public service performance and efficiency in service delivery in Nigeria. It notes that AAR is a method that uses a review of experience to avoid recurrent mistakes and reproduce success. It can be used to improve responses, improve policy and procedures, and most importantly prevent the same errors from being repeated time and time again. The article believes that AAR is a powerful tool because it produces quick results in a short period and can be applied to a broad range of activities. It reveals that notwithstanding the misgivings, AAR is considered a good idea as it gives the state actors/public servants opportunity to review the mission of the organisation, what went well? What could have gone better? What might have done differently? Moreover, who needs to know more to improve performance?. The article, therefore, concludes that After Action Review is a useful mechanism for assessing performance in public sector organisation, its application in Nigerian public service, therefore, will improve performance and efficient service delivery. It recommends some measures for the successful implementation of AAR to achieve adequate performance and efficiency in public-sector management and the provision of services in the Nigerian public service in particular and Africa as a whole.

**Key words:** *After Action Review, Efficiency, Performance, Public Service, Service Delivery*

## **Introduction**

Public service is the central focus of the governmental administration. Thus, it is a crucial factor in determining the success or failure of any governments' development policy. This is because public service as the nucleus of administrative management has long been acknowledged by

scholars and practitioners of public administration (Bontunde, 2009). The public service is the public institution, which is responsible for the delivery of essential services to the people (Kauzya, 2011). Okafor, Fatile and Ejalonibu (2014) opined that public service could be recognised as an administrative structure within which the work of government is executed or carried out. Efforts at ensuring efficient service delivery, therefore, remains the most important function of any government all over the world. Therefore, the transformation of any nation largely depends on the performance of the public service.

Improving the performance of the public service, therefore, is the central focus of any government. The need for government agencies to improve performance and effectiveness in public services is becoming ever greater (McBride, 2008). Civil service has significantly expanded in the past century, with the expansion and the changing role of government, the number of complaint about public service performance has grown. As a result, around the world today, governments are experiencing a widening gulf between themselves and the people they serve (Afegbua & Adejuwon, 2015).

As a result, over the last decade, many countries are introducing significant changes in the mode, operations and the structure of their civil services. Hence, making public service more available to users and improving the quality and efficiency are critical challenges for the modernisation of the public sector (Adejuwon, 2016; Chukwuemeka & Innocent, 2011; Mitchell, 2000). These attempts in the view of André (2009) have met with mixed and sometimes even detrimental results. Consequently, the call for governmental organisations that can achieve sustainable high performance is getting louder and louder.

The past three decades have witnessed an intensified debate and structural changes to improve public sector performance (Hookana, 2011). The renewed interest of academics, policy makers, and international organisations in the analysis and quantification of the performance and efficiency of public service has been encouraged by the current drive of delivering public goods and maintaining public service through cost reduction, accountability, and value-for-money (Afonso, Romero & Monsalve, 2013). As a result, questions about the performance and efficiency of the public sector have been raised more and more often. Public service effectiveness in the delivery of services has been a challenge in the world and particularly in the

third-world countries. The public service structure inherited from colonial masters was meant for control and exerting authority. It has had weaknesses which apparently are mostly conservative. The colonial influence in the views of Lankester and Maket (2012) has affected development process in the third-world countries.

Civil service in Nigeria like other African countries has not been active regarding service delivery, but only serve the interest of minority (Hope, 2012). The civil service in Nigeria as noted by Adejuwon (2012) is disturbed with the challenges of gross incompetence and ineffective management. To address this situation, successive governments in Nigeria have talked about the need to reduce the cost of governance and make more money available for efficient operation of the civil service (Fatile & Adejuwon, 2017). It is essential for the public administration to be aware of the necessity to give value for money and to implement performance at a various level of government to enhance sustainable performance. Besides, scholars like Fatile and Ajulor (2014) believed that one of the reasons why civil service is not performing adequately in Nigeria is because policy formulation is not being carried out by professional executives with considerable managerial freedom who has an extensive duty to report to the Executive core the results of their performance. Thus, there is increasing awareness among academia and policy makers in the governmental bodies concerning performance and efficiency in the public sector.

Researches on the application of the AAR in African setting in general and Nigeria, in particular, are very few. The article is a contribution to the existing body of literature by extending the analysis of After Action Review in improving the performance and efficiency of public-sector organisations. This article is part of few attempts in the literature to quantify government performance and effectiveness through After Action Review in the Nigerian public service. This article joins a growing literature in seeking to address how public sector organisation can be managed to deliver the much-needed services to the people. The article, therefore, advocates for the implementation of After Action Review as a mechanism for improving performance and efficiency in Nigerian public service. AAR seeks to improve the means through which public organisations operate to improve performance through mission-driven, result-oriented, and quality-enhanced management.

## **Theoretical Framework**

A proper research as noted by Defee, Williams, Randall, & Thomas (2010) should be grounded in theory. The article utilises public choice theory as the framework for analysis. The theory was formulated by James M. Buchanan (1919). The central focus of public choice theory is that man a rational being, desiring to operate autonomously and seeking to satisfy his personal and self-interest (Boston et al. 1996). It assumes that public servants pursue their self-interest rather than that of the public.

The theory posits that actors in the public service make purposive goal seeking choices based on their preferences (i.e., they are rational). The theory assumed that individual could choose according to what they feel is right for them. To public choice theorists, apart from personal choices, public interest has no meaning. Therefore individual operating in the public service behave irrationally to achieve the purpose of his/her profession (Sapru, 2013).

The importance of public choice theory according to Ayee (2008) include: First, it offers a coherent explanation for seemingly non-rational policy-making by governments. Second, it explains why "the public interest" may not be achieved. Third, it demonstrates the barriers to reform that are created by pre-existing policies, by focusing on the power of vested interest, and by the political relationships that they engender. Also, it explains the willingness of public officials to respond to the pressures and imprecations of pressure groups and other types of special interests. Also, it explains policy choices that are detrimental to society as a whole and offer a way of understanding the limitations on the policy change that develop over time.

Public choice theory strictly opposes the bureaucratic model of administration. The theorists criticised the poor reward system, which resulted in a poor performance in the public sector, and giving rise to mismanagement of resources and an inbuilt tendency for the increase in the cost of governance and for delivery to take precedence rather than productivity (Larbi, 1999). The theory contends that the public organisations underperform because state bureaucrats pursue personal and selfish interests rather than the benefit of the people. Public choice theory believes

that public goods can be realised when individuals in groups bind themselves together to behave collectively through the use of rules.

Scholars have widely criticised the theory on its inability to cope up with field situations and circumstances. These scholars are of the view that public choice theory is extreme in its opinion and hence unrealistic. The major criticism of the theory is that it may give short shrift to the important function that domestic institutions play in the determination of the outcomes of policy due to group interest which is displayed as if they were operating in an institutionally unconstrained system environment. Despite the shortcoming, the theory is still relevant to this article, because the bureaucrats are expected to deliver services needed by the people.

## **Conceptual Explanations of After Action Review, Performance, and Efficiency**

**After Action Review:** After Action Review is a review technique, for appraising ongoing or past operational activity. AAR is increasingly being used by, teams, organisations and groups, to evaluate their performance by reflecting back on their decisions and activities (Richard & Isobel, 2003). AAR is a discussion of an event with the emphasis on performance, which encourages members of a group to analyse for themselves what happened and why, and how to sustain or improve strengths and weaknesses (Solon, 1998). It is a systematic review of a group's performance after a recently completed task or event (Ellis & Davidi, 2005).

AAR is a form of group reflection of what was intended, what happened, why it happened and what was learned. , to discuss achievements and shortcomings of their actions. The essence of this exercise is to learn from the experience and learned from their success or otherwise to accomplish related tasks more efficiently the next time a similar activity or project is conducted (Olivier, 2008). AAR focused on four questions:

- a) What was expected to happen?
- b) What occurred?
- c) What went well and why?
- d) What can be improved and how?

The purpose of AAR is to bring out insights, observations and questions to help identify mistakes and identify the areas that need to improve upon to increase performance. AAR takes a little time, generates rapid results and can be easily learned and repeated. It also determines how to correct shortcomings, sustain strengths, and focus on the performance of a particular task. The primary goal of AAR is to improve performance and adaptive learning by systematically reviewing team successes and failures

**Performance:** Performance is seen as the result of various inputs, organisational processes or management practices, outputs and longer-term impacts or outcomes, and the corporate environment. This notion stresses that management, organisation, and environment are in the same interactive process, and it is very challenging to point out is public sector performance depended more for instance on managerial practices or the consequence of a favourable context (Quinn & Rohrbaugh, 1983; Walker et al. 2010).

Performance is the execution of work or goals to the expected level of desired satisfaction, and that it can be revealed regarding the ability of to accomplish the desired expectations of three primary stakeholders comprising owners, employees, and customers (Esu & Inyang, 2009; Aluko, 2003). Performance can be measured by a set of standard to determine how an activity is carried out (Arolowo, 2012).

**Efficiency:** Efficiency is expressed in the form of the interaction between inputs and outputs (Bernard, 2013). Harvey (2007) defined efficiency as the rate of inputs to outputs. It can be explained as the level of performance using the minimum amount of inputs to deliver the highest level of output (McCullough, 2012). Hence, it focuses on resources, goods and services, and the rates at which these are used to deliver expected result.

## **Methodology**

The study is qualitative and descriptive. It uses secondary data from peer reviewed journals, government publications, textbooks, newspapers articles, magazines, government gazette, internet materials, etc.

## **The History and Development of After Action Review**

The After Action Review was first developed by the United States Army's National Training Center (NTC) in the 1970's. It was used to debrief military actions immediately following an event to assess performance, identify strengths and weaknesses, and use the information to enhance performance. The National Training Centre was created to change the way the US Army prepare their leaders, through realistic, intense and extreme battles against opponents. During these periods, the opposing group review their actions. Due to the effectiveness of AAR, it has become a well-established standard and procedure for training and retraining groups in operations.

The AAR process has also been found useful in fields where high-risk, high-stake work is carried out. In the United Kingdom, the National Health Service has adopted the AAR. It is now commonly acknowledged as an efficient process, and *immediate response in training law enforcement agencies* (Morrison & Meliza, 1999). Other services like US Wildland fire-fighting department, Canadian Army, Singapore Police, British Petroleum, United Kingdom Health Care Service, USAID, and US Fire Teams have adopted AAR in reviewing the performance of their organisations.

In 2004, it was used by Oxfam and various other global aid agencies during tsunami disaster in providing relief materials to the victims displaced by the catastrophe. Also in 2005 after Hurricane Katrina in the USA, and cyclone Sidr in Bangladesh in 2007 (Jefferson, 2006 Morrison & Meliza, 1999). Darling & Parry (2002) notes that Shell Oil adopted AAR method in facilitating learning. Fidelity Investment, Shell Oil, Nestle, BP, IBM, Harley–Davidson, Texas A&M University Corps of Cadets have utilised AAR for efficient performance.

AAR process is one of the essential phases of the training process through the facilitation of "learning while doing," improving team working spirit, to increase confidence in the leader and also to lead to a more skilled and cohesive armed force. It is therefore essential to note that most

countries in Africa including Nigeria have not been adopting AAR in reviewing performance in the public service.

## **Performance and Efficiency in the Public Sector: The Context and Contents**

In the public service, performance means the ability of an organisation to achieve set goals and provide quality services to citizens (Obal & Basariah, 2016). Measuring the public sector performance has lately become an increasingly important topic. Measuring performance in the public sector in the opinions of Zhonghua and Ye (2012) faces some challenges when putting into practice: the multidimensional nature of the objectives whose fulfilment level must be measured; the necessary information. Also, current systems for measuring performance in the public sector present some limitations because they are based only on economic indicators, which are mainly fiscal that fail to gauge the fulfilment of social and environmental objectives of the public organisations (Mihaiu, 2013).

Efficiency is a core organisational value for public organisations and has a long and venerable pedigree within the history of public service (Simon, 1976). In recent times, Schachter (2007) and Hoggett (2006) observes that the search for efficiency has come to be linked with the private sector solutions embraced by the New Public Management (NPM). NPM type reforms tend however to focus on efficiency. By managing government more like a business, NPM reforms promise to improve productive efficiency by changing *how* public services are delivered (Boyne, 2002).

The recognition of the efficiency problem in public service delivery – amongst both citizens and governments – goes some way towards explaining the prominence and persistence of NPM. The perception that NPM business-like reforms of a bloated public sector will improve civil service efficiency retains a powerful, visceral appeal even though the evidence of effectiveness gains remains very mixed, to say the least (Andrews, 2010).

The crucial role of public service efficiency in public service delivery cannot be over-estimated. It affects the performance through productivity changes in the public sector itself, and via effects

on the industry. This is as a result of the fact that public services are responsible for a significant proportion of the overall output of an economy. This article argues that to reject the pursuit of efficiency as somehow anathema to the aims of government as some critics of NPM do, is to throw the baby out with the bathwater. Rather than running away from the efficiency question, we make the case that it is better to incorporate public sector values within the rubric of a concept of effectiveness (Arellano-Gault, 2010). Measuring efficiency of public sector organisations is rather difficult than their private counterparts.

## **The Nigeria Public Service Performance and Efficiency Deficit: Looking Back, Looking Ahead.**

The colonial masters created the Nigerian public service as an administrative structure for the implementation of government policies and programmes during the colonial rule. Like another post-colonial state, the Nigerian public service was not directed toward developmental agenda by the colonialist. Rather it was established to serve as a conduit pipe to syphon the available resources in Nigeria (Fatile, Olojede & Adejuwon, 2015). Since independence in 1960, it has metamorphosed to a broad, complex and bureaucratic organisation for harnessing the available resources to facilitate development (Inyang, 2008).

Due to performance failure of the public service after independence, it has been restructured and reformed, yet has remained the same. As a result, the Nigerian public sector is experiencing inefficiencies in performing its roles (Adejuwon, 2014).

However, despite the tremendous efforts and resources toward the restructuring of the public service, progress remains scant and less impressive (Willis, 2005). The Nigerian public service today is a battered institution, it is resistant to change and has become the object of public criticisms.

In most African countries and particularly in Nigeria, the civil service has been characterised by corruption, the absence of accountability, inefficiency, lack of transparency and low productivity. Achebe (1983) presents the picture of the Nigerian public service thus:

*The greatest sufferer is the country itself which has to accommodate the legitimate grievance of an oppressed citizen; accept the incompetence of a favoured citizen and, more important and greater scope, experience a general decline in confidence and subversion of efficiency caused by an irregular system of performance and reward (Achebe, 1983).*

The level of performance in the public service has always been a primary concern to various governments in Nigeria. Because, the public service has been characterised by poor performance and inability to translate government policies and programs to reality (Arowolo, 2012). The perennial problem with public service is the difficulty in measuring efficiency and improving productivity (Adejuwon, 2016).

The Nigerian public service, over the years, has experienced many teething problems that have affected the effectiveness and efficiency of the system. This has led the initiation of several reforms by successive governments aimed at improving the public sector. These changes were intended to improve public service delivery. They have not significantly improved the service offerings of the civil service (Inyang & Akaegbu, 2014). Despite all measures put in place to address the performance failure in Nigeria, the service, has defied all measures towards tackling the problem of inefficiency and capacity collapse (Olaopa, 2010).

The Nigerian governments have always been worried about the performance of the public sector. Various mechanisms performance has developed in line with governments' attitudes to public sector and public employees. The perennial problem with public service is the difficulty in measuring efficiency and improving productivity (Jike, 2003, Adebayo, 2001 & Okafor, 2005).

Over the years, poor performance by the public service hurt public infrastructure such as transportation, communication, health care, power, communication, education among others. As a result, Nigeria has missed several opportunities to attain the expected level of development that will affect the lives and well-being of the people (Adejuwon, 2011).

Due to decline in service delivery to the people as a result of corruption and mismanagement, the performance of public service in Nigeria has become a challenge. No wonder, Obasanjo (2003) notes that:

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*Nigerians have been adversely affected by the quality of public service. Our public offices have been showcases for combined evils of inefficiency and corruption while being impediments for effective implementation.*

Public service in Nigeria has become the focus of constant debate due to dwindling infrastructure, mismanagement, corruption and poor service delivery. These have resulted in increases in the cost of governance, debt burden, and inability to pay worker's salaries (Achimugu, Stephen, & Agboni, 2013; Emmanuel, Ajanya, & Audu, 2013). After years of implementing New Public Management, service delivery has continued to be a major challenge to public service in Nigeria. The poor state of the provision of services affects all citizens who demand quality services from the public sector.

Okafor, Fatile and Ejalonibu (2014) argued that right actions must be taken to address these challenges highlighted and of course after action review mechanisms are seen as an antidote to having high-quality, forward-looking and creative policy making as well as efficient service delivery in the next decade in Africa in general and Nigeria in particular.

### **After Action Review and Nigerian Public Service: An Overview**

It is important to state that AAR has not been used in Nigeria. Due to security challenge and performance failure in the public service, this article is advocating for the introduction of AAR in Nigeria. When administered in a climate of openness, clarity and commitment to identifying and recommending solutions, after-action review will yield many benefits.

Today in Nigeria ethnic animosity, domination and suspicion exists. Citizens are still calling for restructuring and a national conference to determine the condition for coexistence because they are not satisfied with the current state of the country. Since AAR catalyses cultural change, it can lead to reconciliation, reconstruction, and rehabilitation in Nigeria. In curbing the menace of terrorism and insurgency in North-East Nigeria, AAR is a veritable tool in fighting terrorism and proffer permanent solution to the crisis. It will assist the armed forces in analysing their strengths and weaknesses and how to forge ahead.

AAR is a potent mechanism capable of enhancing the performance of the public sector and does also have the capabilities of adaptation in different cultural settings. For Nigeria to enjoy the benefit of AAR, public organisations must intensify their efforts to integrate to process into governmental operations. Leaders need to create a climate of transparency, openness, selflessness, and candour where the people can review their actions and challenge performance failure. The introduction of AAR in Nigeria will strengthen teams and improve performance. It will also improve the evaluation of achievements and demonstration of the overall capabilities being validated.

## **Implications of After Action Review on Efficiency and Performance in the Public Service**

AAR play an important in public-sector management. AAR identify the mistakes, how to correct deficiencies, sustain strengths for the fulfilment of the particular mission (Morrison & Meliza, 1999).

AAR has been found useful particularly in the military and other public sector organisations for decades. Specifically, AARs provide members of a group or team with the opportunity to analyse their actions or performance, the areas of strength and weakness and potential changes that may improve the performance of the organisation (Ellis, Mendel, & Nir, 2006; Zakay, Shnuel, & Shevalsky, 2004). The application of AAR can lead to new and efficient means of working together for continuously improving and strengthening capacity for action (Garvin, 2000; Gurteen, 2000). AAR provides a group with an easy and powerful tool for enabling them to continue learning from their daily experiences.

AAR can be a useful tool in ensuring efficiency in the public sector. AAR fits right into the reflective the performance. AAR is a systematic review of activities after a recently completed task or event (Ellis & Davidi, 2005). In other words, it allows participants to discover what happened, what to keep or fix, and how to improve for the next time.

AAR is a powerful tool that produces immediate results that can be utilised in a broad range of activities. It helps to uncover insight into planning and execution processes, shed light on areas

that are performing well and things that need to be done to improve performance. Muhaiu (2013) explained the usefulness of AAR in the public sector thus:

*If you noticed less-than-stellar results, the after action review process could be helpful in recognising where things fell apart and how to improve on these areas. Also, it is possible to see what inspired excellent results and indicate best practices.*

AAR evaluates performance against the established performance objective; identify the area of strengths and weaknesses; and decide how to improve the performance of the organisation.

## **Concluding Remarks**

The public service plays a very prominent role in the governmental administration as the engine room of government through the implementation of government policy and programmes (Chukwuemeka & Innocent, 2011). This article aimed to catch the nature of the discourse of public service performance in the wider context of current ideas about the role played by public service in the provision of essential services and, the basis on which efficiency in delivering services of high quality can be achieved.

There is no doubt that without an efficient public service, the implementation of government policies and programs that are aimed at improving the living standard of the people will be adversely affected. For improved performance in the Nigerian public sector, there is the need for continuous training and retraining of civil servants and developmentally oriented technocrats, while an improvement on their technical expertise remains cardinal. Therefore policymakers/civil servants need to access their actions and inactions as it occurs to increase the performance of the public sector.

Improving performance and effectiveness in public service delivery should be an important element of public service to enhance governance and reduce corruption. This article believes that high efficiency in public service delivery in Nigeria can, therefore, be achieved through the adoption of After Action Review. It implies that the employees can be empowered to improve their service delivery.

The article provides new knowledge on the phenomenon of performance and efficiency in the context of public service. The paper contributes to the existing research by describing the effectiveness of After Action Review in enhancing the performance and effectiveness in public service delivery. Besides, its academic contribution, the findings of this article is of immense importance to policymakers in proffering sustainable remedial actions that would address performance failure in Nigeria.

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