TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE PUBLIC ORGANIZATIONS: MEASURES FOR IMPROVEMENT

Victor Nwaoba ITUMO
Bucharest University of Economic Studies
6 Romana Square, 010374 Bucharest, Romania
victoritumo@yahoo.com

Abstract. *The paper focuses on the concept of 'towards sustainable public organizations'. It will take a definitive holistic view of public organizations, role and functions of public organizations, status or characteristics of the public organization and the brief schools of thought or model of public organization; assess the challenges and proffer possible suggestions towards their resolution. Public organizations are beginning to face more operational challenges such as competition locally and internationally, competition occasioned by digital commercial enterprises – online super business, security threats including online threats by hackers, higher operational cost, technological innovations and improvised alternatives. There is also the issue of impacts occasioned by globalization, global terrorist activities, climate change effects, continuous increase in the demography of the world, etc. Such challenges as above had made it extremely vital for public organizations to take inventory of strategies for sustainability and efficiency, just as combating these kinds of challenges task public organizations more not only in the discharge of their roles and functions but in also keeping the establishment from external threats. The research approach or methodology, making use of secondary data, would do a holistic assessment of such concepts as public organizations, sustainable public organizations, identify what the traditional and contemporary challenges of the public organizations are, assess the impacts of the challenges of public organizations with a view to drawing suggestions and recommendations towards their resolution from experiences and practices that are widely applicable in various climes of the world. The research would clearly look at the following; definitive holistic view of public organizations, concepts as public organizations; what is sustainable public organization; role and functions of public organizations; status of public organizations; brief school of thought on public organizations; identify traditional challenges of public organizations; identify contemporary challenges of public organizations; assess the challenges public organizations; suggestions towards their resolution of challenges of Public organizations; operational challenges such as competition locally and internationally; competition occasioned by digital commercial enterprises such as online super business, security threats including online threats by hackers, higher operational cost, technological innovations and improvised alternatives.*

Keywords: public; organizations; sustainable; bureaucratic; post-bureaucratic; globalization; operation.

Introduction

It could be rightly adjudged that there are newer kinds of public organizations that may be traced to the rise of newer kinds of societal challenges that have to be addressed by the public sector. In addition, a growing dimension of the challenges of public organizations is because of the rise in population, technological and digital innovations taking place across the globe. The need for quality service delivery continues to increase as local public institutions are further challenged by contemporary global operators or cross-border operators. There is also threat aimed at public organizations existing at the global level by known and unknown groups some of which operate clandestinely or even in broad daylight. All these have much more than before made it expedient for public organizations to innovate towards improved performance of assigned roles and functions. This is more so as there is also the need to favorably perform in a world that constantly perceives increasing competitions; even the necessity of wading off effectively, threats at any level. This article assesses some of these critical issues and proffers recommendations on measures for improved performance towards sustainable public organizations.

What is a public organization?

"Public organizations serve the role of providing public services and creating and implementing public policy. This role goes beyond the issues of efficiency and effectiveness and includes values of equality, justice, and transparency" (Rodney & Sherman, as cited in Raymond, 2009, p.79). They further referred to public organizations as a "collective of individuals operating within a boundary that defines insiders and outsiders" (Rodney & Sherman, as cited in Raymond, 2009, p.79). Sheasby (2016, p.1) observes in an online article that, "A Public Organization is a state-run organization. It is government controlled and is paid for by public taxation. Usually, a general tax will pay for state provisions, but in some cases an alternative tax will." He further states "Public organizations take care of matters that the public informs the government - via voting, protests, or debate - that they should be handling and assisting with. The public demand a service and the Government, as elected representatives and officials, have a duty to adhere to those wishes and orchestrate a fair but effective service to help those who need it. Examples of public organizations would be the Police and Fire Services" (Sheasby, 2016, p.1). On the other hand, Shepherd (2013, p.4) notes, "public organizations ("bureaucracies") are the state's agents for public collective action". It further emphasizes that "Public organizations deliver public services with more or less efficiency, equity, honesty, and accountability" (Shepherd, 2013, p.4). In another consideration, the public organization was defined as thus, "Public organizations carry out tasks on behalf of society. In higher education, for example, this might entail preparing study reforms through a government ministry and implementing new study programs through public universities and colleges. Organizations can thus be understood as tools or instruments for achieving certain goals seen as important in society, such as raising the standard of higher education" (Christensen et al., 2007, p.20).

Summarily, a public organization can be defined as the state-owned institutions or establishments with which public order and public services are provided for the society. Public organizations represent the tool used by public administration or

management to implement public policies and moderate the public life in various segments of the society. Different kinds of public organizations exist for different purposes of government. Examples include Ministry of transport for transport systems, Ministry of health for the health sector, Ministry of Justice for legal, prosecution and litigation issues, Ministry of Foreign Affairs for foreign relations, Ministry of works for the work sector, Ministry of power for the power sector, Ministry for petroleum resources for the energy sector, Ministry of Sports for issues relating to sport, etc. Some public organizations also exist as Agencies or corporations established for commercial purposes and profit maximization as applicable in some countries. Examining the role and functions of public administration could help to provide a better understanding of public organizations and what they are set to accomplish.

Role and functions of public organizations

As could be identified and deduced from various sources, some the roles and functions of public organizations include the under-listed.

Provides public services – the public organizations work according to the regulations or laws setting them up and ensures the provision of services to the society. However, public organizations provide varying services which differ from each other.

Helps to formulate and create public policies – the public organizations also help to formulate and create public policies with which the public administration exercises the role of administration and management of the society. Public organizations do this through a period of time-based on their existing knowledge and research which could be attributed to the fact of their role as custodian of public properties, Libraries, artifacts, historical documents and archives, cultural information, traditions, norms and customs of the people over the years.

Helps to implement public policies – the formulation of public policies is quite different from the implementation. In addition, the public organizations serve as channels through which the public policies are implemented and carried out within the society. Some public organizations have roles and functions that exceed national boundaries, causing their scope of influence to be sub-regional, regional, or completely global.

Serves as the tool of public administration in the organization of the society – public administration in every society do not go out there to discharge services directly to the people. Instead, public organizations serve as the tool of the public administration for rendering services and discharge of their responsibilities to the public.

Helps the public administration in realizing set objectives in effective governance – just as in the case above, it is public organizations that help the public sector leadership to realize the set objectives of government, especially in democratic societies where they are allowed a great level of independence to carry out their functions. Democratic governments of various countries have goals and set democratic dividends for delivery to the people, public organizations are charged with these and directed to expeditiously discharge it to the public. Such services could take various forms for passage to the people, but in the final analysis, the public organizations –

establishments and institutions based on carved out roles, deliver these services and functions to the public.

Helps in ensuring public order within the society – the various services provided by the public administration through the instrumentality of the public organizations helps to ensure public order and increase the confidence of the citizenry in the state administration. The issue of public order is very important, just as could be seen in societies where there is abysmal provision of public services, there is usually unease on the part of the people which seldom results in change of public leadership through periodic elections or the protest by the people against poor services by a particular public organization or the local authorities.

Helps the public administration to evaluate extent of attainment of set targets and objectives – after targets for achievement have been set by the political leadership or public administration, it is still the public organizations which have been charged with the implementation that is looked upon to provide the evaluation of the extent of performance or realization of the set goals and targets.

What is a sustainable public organization?

The word 'sustainable' has been defined by Oxford Online Dictionary (2016) as something that is "able to be maintained at a certain rate or level". In essence, sustainable is viewed as something that is able to be maintained consistently at a certain level. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2016) variously defines sustainable as "able to be used without being completely used up or destroyed"; "involving methods that do not completely use up or destroy natural resources"; "able to last or continue for a long time"; "capable to be sustained". On the other hand, Cambridge Online Dictionary (2016) defines sustainable as "able to continue over a period of time"; "causing little or no damage to the environment and therefore able to continue for a long time".

Drawing inference from the definitions of sustainable above, it could then be averred that sustainable public organization means a public institution or establishment that is able to be maintained, sustained, causing little or no harm to the society and environment of operation and is able to continue for a long time. Sustainable public organizations could be seen as those publicly owned establishments which are able to operate efficiently and effectively, playing significant roles, offering expected services and exercising their relevance in such a way as to justify their existence, while sufficiently supporting its operations and activities continuously for a long time. Sustainable public organizations could additionally be referred as those public establishments or institutions that are able to adopt relevant new skills, technological innovations, results of advancement in studies, to reform and transform them to new realities and confront newer challenges in a way that ensures continuous relevance and meeting of set goals and obligations.

Public organizations cannot claim to be sustainable if they are not able to maintain rendering of services and functions or doing so abysmally such that other competitors are better at rendering or performance of the similar services as theirs. More so, public organizations cannot be referred to as sustainable if they are unable to combat new

kinds of a threat to the environment of operations. In addition, if an establishment is unable to sustain and strengthen its existent for a long time, ensuring its relevance, then it may not be referred to as relevant.

Brief schools of thought on public organizations and status of public organizations

There have been references made by Kernaghan, Marson and Borins (2000) to two forms of public organizations which are the traditional bureaucratic public organization and the new Public organization also referred to as a post-bureaucratic model of public organization. The example of the traditional model was cited which was the award winning office of the registrar General in Ontario, Canada, that had typical bureaucratic structure such as deep layers of management (6 layers from director to front line), too specialized functionality (12 separate units), jobs were too detailed and responsibilities over controlled (147 staff with 41 job descriptions that had 23 different job classifications). Post-bureaucratic model of public organizations is those that have adopted emergent reforms for better efficiency and effectiveness.

Irrespective of the categorization of public organizations or schools of thought held, what is most crucial to point out is that public organizations must adopt new measures and reforms to be able to be more effective and efficient. This position is more pronounced given the emergent challenges facing the public organization in the 21st century.

The status of public organizations which explains the conception, ownership, management, functions, funding and other issues within which they are situated are identified and explained below.
- Public organizations are publicly owned
- Public organizations are financed by the public fund.
- Public organizations are run by set public policies or standards as against private organizations which may be run by idiosyncratic opinions.
- Public organizations are set up by public administration through public policy or legislative framework.
- Public organizations have a higher level of stability and continuity so long as laws setting them up are not abrogated.
- Public organizations are set up because of overriding public interest and therefore may not be held liable for minor infringements or inconveniences to few individuals in the society.
- Public organizations operate within the confines of the laws that set them up.
- Public organizations as a legal entity may be sued at the law court, especially in a democratic society.

Christensen et al. (2007) also indicated some characteristics of public organizations. They include, public organizations have leadership elected by popular votes. This is to say that public organizations are led by political leadership at the helm of affairs at the state level to which the public organization management accounts to. They noted specifically that such political leadership is democratically elected. Next according to them is that public organizations are multifunctional, implying that some of the publicly owned establishments are charged with multiple task or responsibilities

sometimes to discharge for the society. Thirdly, they further observed that public organizations do not operate within a free and competitive market.

Traditional challenges of public organizations

Too much bureaucracy, bureaucratic delays or red-tape-ism.: public organizations were traditionally known to be too bureaucratic, sluggish and too slow in discharging functions. This was because of the numerous numbers of people often required to convey approval for actions to be discharged. This sharply contrast with decision making or process of getting approval in private organizations where Chief Executive Officer (CEO), General Managing Director (GMD) or the business or organization owner could unilaterally and suddenly make and effect a decision. The situation of bureaucracy in public organization sometimes happens in a way that could be described as most unfortunate in some climes where public services processed has not been well developed or formalized or given the attention it requires. There are some cases of services broken down for weeks or even months without being fixed. There are cases of absence of relevant staff and it affects many other progressive processes of operations for a very long time.

Slow decision-making process – much like the case of bureaucratic delays, slow decision process used to be one of those known characteristics of public organizations and is subsumed in the existence of too much bureaucracy as explained above. The slow decision-making process affects effective and efficient performance in public organizations.

A Larger number of people handling lesser units of responsibilities – there used to be more people handling lesser or fewer units of responsibilities. For example, a case of ten persons handling the work of six persons. This too reduces efficiency in the productivity of the public organization as well creates awkwardness in the lines of reporting. The public organizations spend more also in compensation of more workers who do the work that fewer people could have done.

The lesser act of holding anyone responsible for shortfalls, it is blamed on the system rather than on individuals – the workers in public organizations were often seen as carrying out their roles and functions on behalf of the organizations, so it made it hard for most workers to be held liable for event things went wrong. This scenario had the potential of eliciting reckless behavior from a worker knowing fully well that he may not be directly held liable for his actions and inactions.

Issues of liability or litigation rest on the organization rather than on individuals – public organizations management are often sued in cases of litigation against the organization instead of individuals. This occurs even when the issue at stake is caused by an individual worker. This could promote acts of carelessness on the part of some workers since liability may lie with the public organization and not them.

The traditional challenges of the public organizations discussed above accounts for what used to be the case in public organizations' operations. There had been improvements in the configuration and operations of public organizations especially with the emphasis on the post-bureaucratic model of public organizations.

Emerging challenges of public organizations

Improved and modern communication needs – public organizations now have the need for improved and modern communication gadgets. This is especially because of the advancements in the information communication technology (ICT) industry some of which make passage of information easier and cost effective.

Improvised alternatives and/or better services providers at the global market and new forms of competitions – online super businesses, digital commercial enterprises- there are super businesses or what could also be referred to as supranational organizations which operate across borders or beyond national boundaries with a presence in many countries. They have the capacity to disrupt or seek to take over some kinds of services rendered by some public organizations if allowed by foreign governments.

Security threats including those from online hackers – there are obvious security threats from terrorist activities and now includes more than before the disruptive activities of cyber security threats or online hackers attacking governments or seeking to dismantle or take over public organizations' operations and websites from the farthest of distances which is closest due to advancements in global online technologies.
- The need for technological innovations and know-how - Public organizations now have a need to advance in technology and expertise in order to be in tune with the with the modern times where globalization in various concepts is pushing out so much placing additional demands on organizations.
- The higher cost of operation - because of increase in operations arising from an increase in population requiring various services offered by public organizations, there now exists higher cost of operations.
- Increase in population and demand for services
- Multitasking roles – public organizations also currently have multitasking roles to play as seldom assigned by legislation or the political leadership.

Kernaghan et al. (2000) identified some forces driving public service reform which can also be seen as the newer kinds of challenges facing the public organizations. They identified External forces and domestic forces as the kinds of driving forces. Some of the external forces or challenges include globalization, technological revolution. Some of the domestic forces or challenges include financial constraints, public demand for quality services, the changing political culture, demographic change, the legacy of earlier reforms. It can be underscored following the above explanation that on the external factor, globalization and technological innovations affects public organizations. By globalization, it implies there are international issues affecting local public organizational performance and services. Under this factor of globalization, it can also be averred that, presently, there is greater integration and cooperation along economic blocs, geographical propinquity, military needs and defense, health, etc. global cooperation along these lines often affects the nature of performance or services of even a localized public organization of various countries. A good example in this regard would be the copyright commissions' agencies or organizations in various countries which considers as registered any registration already done in another country which is a member or signatory of the Berne Convention on intellectual property rights. Further, on the technological revolution on external factors, there are now technological discoveries and incursions that challenge the status-quo of

performance and services rendered by public organizations and therefore place them under pressure for reform and advancement or upgrade of systems and platforms of operations. On the domestic forces, financial constraints is a great challenge to public organizations as countries are only able to fund them based on the availability of funds at the state level as often presented in the annual budget estimates. The drawing of funds by the public organization from consolidated funds of a country are usually minimal, most still have to depend on budgetary provision for funding. When the budget is low or is delayed in passage and release of funds, the services, and activities of public organizations are affected negatively. Further, in the domestic forces driving public organizations, the public demand for better services has become a recurrent feature in the society towards the public organization. Given advancements in technological communication systems and the impact of globalization where there is also the existence of cross-border trades, the public of most enlightened societies are aware of services provided by other public organizations in other climes and therefore expect something more if possible or on the minimum requirement, services comparable to another quality one across the border. This challenge is even profound given the fact that people can now buy from or do business with other countries' public organizations providing some kinds of specialized services without necessarily leaving the confines of their house in another country. This leaves localized public organizations with no choice of lowly operations, but the pressure for better performance and services. Also in the domestic aspect is the changing political culture. In countries where there is no adequately entrenched political and public administration culture of continuity of programs and projects which are of interest to the people, the focus and proposals earlier been pursued by public organizations may be upturned or derailed by political leadership or new parties that clinch the positions of leadership for the first time. Furthermore, regarding the change in political culture, it used to be in countries where military coups take place that some public organizations have their roles abrogated by unilateral military decrees or their existence disintegrated. In the domestic aspect is also the demographic change. The world population is increasing at a quick succession. This potentially means that there is more to be done in virtually all areas of human needs. These human needs is catered for or provided by various countries' public organizations, besides what is done by the international organizations like the United Nations, world health organization, international monetary funds, Commonwealth of Nations, World Food Program, UNESCO, etc. Also inclusive in the points mentioned under the domestic factors is the legacy of earlier reforms. When public organizations have made a mark of great success and achievement in the past, it only becomes reasonable and wise for them to improve on past legacies and results, meaning they have to continue to improve on their performance and services to exceed previous levels and standards. In essence earlier reforms well positions public organizations for stronger and better performance as the people would not even expect anything less, especially when the right reforms and enabling laws and regulations are in place.

Goodkind (2016) observes of the five biggest threats to businesses right now as was articulated by a retired four-star general and former USA 2004 Democratic presidential candidate Wesley Clark to include, terrorism, cyber security threats, financial system stability, the emergence of China as a superpower with global ambitions and climate change. Goodkind (2016) further reports of Clark's statement as noting that terrorism is a problem that leaks its way into all facets of life, even the economy. He explained that the terrorist attacks on September. 11, 2001, in United

States of America cost an estimated $3.3 trillion, based on the research of The New York Times. He further explained that the other issue of cyber security crimes is the greatest threat facing every business in the world today and often go undetected due to lack of funding which could help to identify and combat the business menace. The other issues of financial system stability, the emergence of China as a superpower with global ambitions and climate change all affect businesses one way or the other. These kinds of problems associated with doing businesses currently at the global level are not only linked to private enterprises, they also form part of the challenges faced by public organizations across the world. Considering the traditional and contemporary or emergent challenges of the public organizations as highlighted in this work, the question now remains what is the way forward for public organizations' progress? What are the means and strategies towards sustainable public organizations? This makes it necessary to adopt a number of measures or strategies which is why this work had come up with suggestions and possible solutions christened below as recommendations.

Conclusions and implications/ discussions on the challenges facing public organization

All the difficulty scenarios that the public organizations find themselves present both challenges and opportunities. Even though some of the challenges facing public organizations are newer kinds thereof, but they still present an opportunity for improvement and increase in efficiency and service delivery. This would be applicable and obtainable for all public organizations that could adopt workable solutions and recommendations proffered in scholarly contributions. The fact remains that the public organizations' problems are already existent and therefore, the only path available in going forward is to seek ways of tackling and resolving them. If public organizations fail to reform and take relevant measures to combat the challenges, whether traditional or emerging ones, they would, without a doubt, hamper their performance and may clearly be exposed to global real threats that are too dangerous for operations of any organization.

Recommendations

A number of recommendations have been advanced in this article as the way forward towards sustainable public organizations at the global level. The recommendations are being made bearing in mind that the environment of operations of the public organizations are much different today than it used to be many years ago. There is no doubt that public organizations need to do more for better performance, services and functions for the political leadership and most importantly to the people, which is because of the array of both traditional and especially the contemporary or emergent challenges faced by them. In the light of the foregoing, the recommendations for enhanced performance of sustainable public organizations include:
- Public organizations should focus on increased research in order to find out how to improve on services and performance, even while delivering on functions and services already in existence.

- Public organizations should seek to increase capacity and potential for enormous services delivery because of the continuous demographic increase in all localities across the globe.
- Public organizations should improve their technological expertise and innovate as a means of being in touch with modern tech tools and operations and in order to be able to resist and block the marauding invasion of online security threats.
- Public organizations should also be economically prudent, as doing so is vital given the economic challenges faced by various countries in the 21st century, even if there is an increase in the cost of operations due to increased services.
- Public organizations should also train their staff periodically as doing so would increase their knowledge base and improve their performance.
- Public organizations must handle the issue of multitasking roles professionally by engaging the requisite employees for the various segments of their operations, instead of using available staff to do all operations which could derail focus and cause mistakes.
- Public organizations must continue to ensure efficient services delivery while maintaining an effective managerial procedure that ensures no online super business or digital enterprise could duplicate their roles or limit interest in their functions or even as an alternative to their set out goals and objectives.

References

Cambridge University Press (2016). Cambridge online dictionary 2016. Retrieved from http://dictionary.c ambridge.org/dictionaryenglish/sustainable.

Christensen, T., Lægreid, P., Roness P.G., & Røvik K.A. (2007). Organization theory and the Public Sector. Retrieved from http://www.europe-solidarity.eu/documents/ES_ORGAN IZAT_THEOR Y_2007.pdf.

Goodkind, N. (2016). Five biggest threats to business right now. Retrieved from http://finance.yahoo.com/news/the-five-biggest-threats-to-business-right-now-182109602.html.

Kernaghan, K., Marson, B., & Borins, S. (2000). The New Public Organisation. Retrieved from https://books.google.ro/books?id=HHGYb0jGqTsC&printsec=frontcover&dq=th e+new+public+organisation+-+Kernaghan

Merriam Webster (2016). Merriam-Webster online Dictionary 2016. Retrieved from http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sustainable.

Oxford University Press (2016). Oxford online Dictionary 2016. Retrieved from http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/sustainable.

Rodney, E., & Sherman, W. (2009). Implications of Organizational influence on ethical behaviour. In W.C. Raymond III (Ed.), *Ethics and Integrity in Public Administration: Concepts & Cases* (pp.77-89). New York: Prentice Hall.

Shepherd, G. (2013). Public organizations: what makes them work? How are they changing? How can the Bank support reform? Retrieved from http://documents.mx/documents /shepherd-flagship-organizations1-public-organizations-what-makes-them-work-how-are-they-changing-how-can-the-bank-support-ref.

Sheasby, L. (2016). What is the definition of public organization. Retrieved from http://business-finance.blurtit.com/2133459/what-is-definition-of-public-organization.