
THE CHALLENGING ROLE OF MANAGEMENT IN A DEVELOPING ECONOMY: ISSUES AND PERSPECTIVES

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INTRODUCTION

Organizations and businesses today are passing through hard times. The philosophy and task of managing are becoming more complex and daunting. This is because all facets of the organization, the economy itself and the human beings seem to be undergoing transformation. The rate of technological change is on the increase and the propensity of such changes tends to affect the way businesses are done; the market place, employment, skills development and acquisition.

The economy and other economic activities tend to witness crescendo leading to extreme competition and competitive activities. The challenges facing business organizations, indeed appear to be multivariate, complex and very complicated. Presently, all over the world especially developing countries like Nigeria, business organizations are facing financial and economic crises. Most economies especially organizations in the developing countries have tended to become comatose, morbid if not totally moribund. The consequences of the contemporary situation appear to indicate that most management of such organizations have been forced to develop and adopt strategies in order to cope and contain such observable avalanche of changes and challenges. Under such unpredictable organizational circumstances, perspicacity and adaptability would dominate management strategies and behaviour.

However, containment of environmental contingencies would indeed be predicated on the ability of management to conceptualize challenges and proffer appropriate solutions. The heterogeneity of the said organizational environment and the crescendo of global dichotomies in cultures, economies and technological, product and service demands tend to compound already complicated challenges facing managements in Nigerian organizations. There have been sustained arguments, opinions and contentions that while organizations in the developed economies have tended to manage the challenges facing them with a reasonable degree of candour and equanimity, organizations in developing country like Nigeria appear to be helpless. Indeed, the same school of thought has tried to buttress its argument by pointing to the contemporary crisis and confusion in the financial and banking sectors of the Nigerian economy. Attention has been drawn by the same school of thought to the near collapse of the Nigerian Stock Exchange and the rate with which many Nigerian organizations are closing down and laying off staff with attendant social and psychological implications to the nation.

RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

The consequences of the above scenario appear to be many and diverse. The organizational environment seems to be manifesting high level of unpredictability and organizations in

Nigeria appear to be at a loss as to what to do. There seems to be scarcity of capital to do business and undertake investments.

Many manufacturing companies appear to be faced with unprecedented level of unsold stock due to low demand. To compound the situation, many Nigerian organizations appear to be managing ageing and outdated equipment and machinery that have become less effective and more expensive to maintain. It has also been reported that in the face of dwindling revenue and cut throat competition, many Nigerian organizations are confronted with demand for higher wages by their staff. Managing impoverished workers who tend to be disoriented mentally and attitudinally with myriad of domestic and societal problems no doubt would tend to pose the greatest challenge to managements.

It has been opined that the poverty level in Nigeria today has worsened when compared to the 1970S and 1980s. It was further reported that the poverty level in Nigeria (indicated by those living below poverty line reached 65.6% in 1998. The situation is worse today. Obviously, there could be no greater challenge to managements and organizations than managing a workforce, majority of whose children and relations appear not to know where the next meal would come from.

Since it is a well known slogan that, "drastic situations demand drastic measures" there is a need therefore, to find out what some Nigerian organizations are doing to contain the myriad of challenges facing them. While it is appreciated that every organization has a limited zone of freedom in terms of decisions and actions, yet given the intensity and the complexity of the observed environmental challenges facing managements in Nigeria, it would be expected that organizations and their management would be sensitive, responsive, contextual, evaluative and absolutely dynamic in deciphering and managing the challenges facing them.

Given the above, the study would set to find out what the actual situation/ challenges facing the organizations are and how they are containing them. The study would also be finding out strategies and actions if any devised and adopted by the various managements to adapt to such reported unfavourable environment. The issue of attitudes, orientation and behaviour of managers in tackling the said challenges is also part of the rationale to undertake the study.

ASSUMPTIONS

Prior to undertaking the study, certain assumptions were made which include the following:

- a. That management skills and principles are universal and transferable hence, what obtains in one organization or country in terms of such skills and principles are transferable to another organization or country.
- b. That the more the environmental challenges, the greater the proactivity and responsiveness of management in terms of decisions and actions.
- c. That all managements of organizations have a means of systematically and continually monitoring their environment.

- d. A prior assumption that there is a direct relationship between organizational environment and degree of management dynamism and pro activity.

In view of the foregoing, the following postulations are put forward:

1. The more volatile and stormy the organizational challenges the greater the management activities to contain them.
2. The more dynamic the management, the greater its ability to adapt and perform better in terms of effectively dealing with the situation.
3. The less responsive, less dynamic the management, the more susceptible it could be to environmental challenges as depicted by failures and poor performance.

REVIEW OF EXISTING LITERATURE

Organizational environment has continuously been changing. Equally true is the fact that management thinking and attitude have tended to follow the same direction. Management of organization all over the world has tried to evolve strategies to cope with the speed of organizational environmental change.

Perrow (1970) has posited that a proper fit must exist between an organization and its environment and that one organization's structure and style of management may be effective in one environment and ineffective in another. The overt challenge of adaptability inherent in Perrow's view highlights the challenge and conceptuality of management.

According to Tosi and Carroli (1985) volatile organizational environment was likely to be turbulent and unstable with more intense changes than in the stable environment. The implications of such observation are that management and organizations must change in order to cope with such changing environment.

Toffler (1985) has observed that the corporate environment has grown increasingly unstable, accelerative and revolutionary. For any organization to survive under such situation it is reasonable to opine that management's role, thinking and actions must not only grow but must change phenomenally in line with the rate of environmental changes. Toffler (1985) has further contended that in a period of intense accelerated change, all management assumptions about the outside world have to be rechecked for accuracy. This contention is more apt given that managerial attitudes to change tend to be traditional.

The philosophy and ideology of management must be juxtaposed with the changing circumstances of the organization. Indeed Collins and Parras (1995) have pointed out that the 'core ideology of management must be balanced with a relentless drive for progress. According to Ohmae (1985) phenomena and events in the real world do not always fit a linear model hence the issue of intellectual ability and skill in solving problems become essentially critical.

Aldrich's (1979) concept of theory of natural selection is relevant. According to the theory, organizations which are effective and also efficient are likely to survive the vagaries of time

while inefficient and ineffective ones become extinct. Obviously, such effectiveness and efficiency come through proper adaptability to environmental situations.

Managements especially, those in the developing world operate in an imperfect and disjointed environment where information for decisions may not be readily available. Yet according to Daft and Marcie (1995) every decision situation can be organized on a scale according to the availability of information and the possibility of failure. Writers like Onyemelukwe (1973) have introduced cultural dimension as among challenges that have bearing in determining the management effectiveness. He has contended that certain cultural contingencies modify the relationship between design and performance.

The cultural and technological dysfunctionality of African and indeed Nigerian organizations has also been noted by Oloko (1972). However, there is a need to establish the degree of challenge posed by the cultural dimension to the managements of Nigerian organizations. The erratic nature of the Nigerian economy has been identified as a major factor militating against effective management in Nigerian organizations (Ekpenyong 1984). Furthermore, the frequency of fiscal and monetary policy changes, as well as the observed avalanche of legislations and amendments, all tend to pose greater challenge to most managements resulting in decision disorientations. It has been emphasized that the nature of mechanisms employed by organizations to formulate, plan and implement their plans are critical in reducing implementation challenges and determining success (Galbraith 1973), Chandler (1962), Galbraith and Nathanson (1978). The issue of locus of critical decision making and formulation of mission statements and objectives tend to be of great importance in the fluidity of management operations.

It has been observed that too much closure during the problem definition phase may be the result of rigidity, predetermined goals or premature specific diagnosis which tend to inhibit the emergence of potentially good alternatives (Alexander 1979), Duhaime (1981), Tversky and Kahneman (1974). According to Braybrooke and Lindblom (1963) different decision making processes result in variations in attitudes to an understanding of the full implications of the problem. Einhorn and Hogarth (1978) have added another dimension to the issue by introducing the concept of "Illusion of validity" in decision making. According to them, decision takers tend to be unknowingly over confident in their ability to predict outcomes of situations. The unpredictability and volatility of the Nigerian environment makes such over confidence certainly outlandish.

The importance of the human resource as a major factor in the organization has also been highlighted by Goodstein and Pfeiffer (1984), Karney (1983), Grone (1981) and Kalsens (1979). The observations seem to be that the psychological orientation of the human resource of the organization if not properly aligned may pose a great challenge to management and the organization. The phenomenon of setting objectives and their importance in minimizing organizational challenges has attracted some attention. The significance of objectives lies in the fact that they tend to serve as the "compass" of the

organization since they continually remind the organization or business concern; the business it is in and hence the direction it ought to go. Thompson and McEwen (1958) have emphasized the importance of setting objectives since according to them; they form part of the process of establishing a favourable balance of power between the business organization and its environment. The inability or otherwise to adopt such process and follow-through appear to pose a challenge.

METHODOLOGY

Questionnaire was designed and administered on 350 managers from 35 different organizations scattered all over the country. The questionnaire was administered on the managers at different conference fora at Abuja and Lagos of human resource managers, accountants and marketers. The questionnaire was administered randomly. There was no previous decision as to the particular type of manager to be administered the questionnaire. The decision that was made was to ensure that at each conference forum as many organizations as possible operating in different parts of the country and in different sectors of the economy, were included. The purpose was to broaden the spectrum of the information gathered.

DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS

Personnel/Human Resource Managers	150
Accountants an Directors of Finance	120
Marketing Managers	80
Total of respondents	350

ANALYSIS OF QUESTIONNAIRE

Table 1: How often is Your Mission Statement Revised?

	%
a) Yearly	30
b) Periodically	50
c) Once a while	10

Table 2: How Would You Describe Method of Setting Corporate Objectives in Your Organization?

	%
a) Top down	65
b) Bottom up	20
c) By consensus	15

Table3: What Style of Decision Making Would You Say is adopted by Your Management?

	%
a) Centralized	58
b) Decentralized	36
c) Mixed	10

Table 4: How Would You Describe Your Organizational Environment?

	%
a) Calm	20
b) Volatile and unpredictable	71
c) Very unpredictable	25

Table 5: What Type of Organization Structure Exists in Your Organization?

	%
a) Highly flexible	10
b) Fairly flexible	28
c) Rigid and unchanging	51

Table 6: How Would You Describe Degree of Change Anticipated by Your Organization?

	%
a) Little	17.5
b) Substantial	63.2
c) Very substantial	21.7

Table 7: Would You Say that the Communication Method and System in Your Organization is?

	%
a) Heavily top down	70
b) Fairly top down	21
c) Fairly bottom up	11

Table 8: Would You Describe Your Organization as?

	%
a) Highly creative and innovative	15
b) Fairly creative and innovative	58
c) Not innovative	17

Table 9: How would you describe the Relationship between Management and Staff?

	%
a) Very friendly	18
b) Fairly Friendly	49
c) Not Friendly	21

Table 10: Would you describe your Organization's Response to Environmental Challenges as?

	%
a) Very responsive	30
b) Fairly responsive	45
c) Slowly responsive	21

Table 11: How would you describe the Financial Situation of Your Organization?

	%
a) Very healthy	32
b) Fairly healthy	21
c) Healthy	45

Table 12: Would you say the Management Style of Your Organization has?

	%
a) Substantially changed over time	18
b) Fairly changed over time	31
c) Not changed much over time	58

Table 13: Would You Say that the Profile of Your Customers has?

	%
a) Substantially changed over time	31
b) Fairly changed over time	29
c) Not changed much over time	46

Table 14: What would you Say have been the Major Challenges Faced by your Organization in the Last 10 Years?

	%
a) Financial	10
b) Technological	5
c) Political	7
d) Competition	11
e) All the above	75

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The questionnaire sought to obtain information on issues germane to the study topic.

The respondents were asked how often the mission statements of their organizations are revised. As can be seen from Table 1, 50% of the respondents said periodically while 30% said yearly. This finding appears consistent with normal practice since mission statements tend not to be changed every time.

The respondents were equally asked to describe the method of setting objectives in their organizations. The information on Table 2 reveals that 65% affirmed it was top down while 20% said it was bottom up. The implication of this finding is that majority of the managements in the organizations appear to be unchanging. It meant that they are sticking to the old style of decision making. This finding appears critical since the trickily up theory holds the view that if staffs are involved substantially in setting organizational objectives that they are more likely to see the complete actualization of such objectives.

The attitude of sticking to trickle down approach of setting objectives could indeed be part of the problem of the inability of some Nigerian organizations to respond appropriately to

challenges. Furthermore, the respondents were asked to indicate the style of decision making in their organizations. The result of the analysis of the data gathered shows that 58% said that the style of decision making- was centralized while 36% were of the opinion that it was decentralized. This result is consistent with the result on the table 2 above. The respondents were requested to describe their organizational environment. As can be observed from Table 4, 20% opined that the environment was calm, 71% viewed it as volatile and unpredictable while 25% said the environment was very unpredictable. Given the prevailing circumstances of the organizational environment in Nigeria and indeed elsewhere, the result tend to reflect actuality.

Since organizational structure is supposed to reflect the type of environment and the challenges the organization tend to deal with, the opinion of the respondents was sought regarding the type of structure existing in their organization. As can be seen from Table 5, 10% saw it as flexible, 28% as fairly flexible while 51% viewed the structure as being rigid and unchanging. This is a significant finding since structure is supposed to be consistent with the organization's environment. Rigid structure in a highly volatile organizational environment indicates that managements appear not to appreciate the challenges posed by the environment. It could also indicate that management tend to be unchanging and non responsive. As a check to table 4 on the analysis, the respondents were asked to describe the degree of change anticipated by their organization, 63.2% of the respondents saw it as substantial, 21.7% said it was very substantial while 17.5% were of the view that change expected was little. The result indeed corroborates the result on table 4. Given the results, it would be expected that managements would put structures, policies and systems in place that would enable them tackle the challenges proactively.

It is generally accepted that the method and system of communication existing in, an organization tends to reflect the management style and therefore, would impact on management's ability to face challenges effectively or otherwise. The respondents were therefore asked to reflect on the method and system of communication in their organization. Majority (70%) of the respondents described the method as heavily top down, while 21% felt it was fairly top down. However, 11% of the respondents said, it was bottom up. In a volatile environment where changes are occurring every time and challenges facing management are ever increasing, flexibility and dynamism in communication method and system become critical ingredients of management effectiveness and efficiency. The more top down the method, the unchanging is the management and the less its ability to cope with exigencies.

Key variables that serve as indicators of how organizational systems have changed over time are the issue of creativity and innovation. The higher degree of unpredictability which the organizational environment has assumed over time would mean that to be afloat organizations and their managements need to be creative and innovative to effectively handle cascading challenges.

The respondents were therefore, asked to describe their organization in terms of creativity and innovation. As Shown on Table 8, 58% of them described their organizations as being fairly creative and innovative, 15% thought their organizations were highly creative and innovative while 17% felt their organizations were not creative and innovative. With the observed and reported magnitude of challenges facing Nigerian organizations today and when you add the 58% of being fairly creative and innovative to 17% of not being innovative, then it would indicate unchanging and conservative management attitude, behaviour and style. Obviously, inability of most Nigerian organizations to squarely face challenges may have their basis from here.

The respondents were asked to describe the relationship between management and style. As can be observed from Table 9, 18% said it was very friendly, 49% felt it was fairly friendly, while 21% were of the opinion that it was not friendly. This result is important since managements have come to realize the critical importance of organizational climate. It would also tend to indicate that many organizations and their management appear to realize that command and control type of management may not be totally relevant today.

The questionnaire also sought to find out from the respondents how prepared they thought their organizations were to face challenges. The results indicate that, Nigerian organizations were responsive to challenges going by the responses hence, 45% said the organizations were fairly responsive while 30% felt they were very responsive. However, 21% described their organizations as being slowly responsive.

The availability of fund or non availability of it is today considered a critical challenge facing managements of organizations in Nigeria.

The respondents were therefore, asked to rate the financial situation of their organizations. The results of the analysis indicate that 32% believed their organizations were financially healthy, 21% thought they were fairly healthy while 45% described them just as being healthy. On the surface, this result appears significant. However, going by the recent revelations of some organizations in Nigeria and indeed else where doctoring their financial records to look good, the opinions expressed here need to be taken with a tinge of salt.

The questionnaire equally sought to find out what the respondents thought about the management style of their organizations. From Table 12, it can be observed that 18% said management style has substantially changed over time, while 31% felt it has fairly changed over time. However, a substantial number 58% of the respondents were of the view that the management style in their organizations has not changed over time.

The implication of this would be that old style of management is being applied to a new situation needing a new style. This finding no doubt appears to be one of the fundamental problems facing most Nigerian organizations in the contemporary situation.

The respondents' opinion was sought as to whether that the profile of their customers has changed over time. According to 31% of the respondents, the customer profile has substantially changed over time, while 29% felt the profile has fairly changed over time. However, 46% of the respondents held the view that customer profile has not changed over time. The cleavage of opinion here indicates confusion over customer profile over time. The implication is that majority felt things had not changed much hence; perhaps there was no need for new ideas and strategies.

Finally, the respondents were asked to indicate what they thought were the major challenges facing their organizations.

It is observable from Table 14, that 10% thought the major challenge was financial while 5% reasoned the challenge was technological. Also, 7% of the respondents viewed the major challenge as political while 11% said it as competition. However, majority of the respondents 75% said that the major challenges were financial, technological, political and competition. What these results seem to indicate is that majority of Nigerian organizations appear to be aware of the challenges facing them. However, whether adequate and relevant actions are taken to address the challenges is difficult to decipher.

Table 15: Pearson's Correlation Coefficients (r).

	ORGANIZATIONAL ENVIRONMENT	DEGREE OF ANTICIPATED CHANGE	ORGANIZATIONAL RESPONSIVENESS TO ENVIRONMENT	MAJOR CHALLENGE FACED OVER TIME
Style of decision making	.22	.37		
Organizational structure	.31	.23		
Communication method & system	.29			
Method of setting objectives		.33		
Creativity and innovation		.45	.34	
Relationship between management and staff		.61	.37	
Organizational financial situation			.57	41
Customer profile over			.38	.23

time				
Style of management				.29
Anticipated change		+		.51

To broaden the spectrum of analysis, some of the variables on the questionnaire were subjected to Pearson's correlation analysis. The purpose was to corroborate the result of the frequency analysis and to establish possible relationship amongst the variables. The Pearson's correlation analysis was carried out at 1% confidence level.

The result of the Pearson's correlation analysis is presented in Table 15. When Degree of anticipation change was correlated with some variables it produced the following coefficients.

- Method of setting objectives r = .33
- Decision making process r = .37
- Organizational structure r = .21
- Creativity and innovation r = -45

Relationship between management and staff produced a correlation coefficient of $r = .61$ all at 1% significant level. The correlation coefficients though positive yet apart from $r = .61$, $r = .45$ which may be described as high the rest results tend to indicate that managements appear not to appreciate the enormity of the challenges facing them.

Organizational environment was correlated with style of decision making; organizational structure and communication method and produced the following correlation coefficients of $r = .22$, $r = .33$ and $r = .29$ respectively. Again, the results tend to indicate that various managements seem not to be facing the challenges as may be desired or expected.

When perceived organizational responsiveness to environment was correlated with

- a) Organizational financial situation;
- b) Customer profile over time; and creativity and innovation, correlation coefficients of $r = .57$, $r = .22$, $r = .34$ respectively were produced at 1% significant level. It can be seen from above that creativity and innovation correlates positively and significantly with organizational responsiveness to the environment which tend to be consistent with normal trend, the rest coefficients though positive, appear to demonstrate that organizations and their management seem not to face challenges as expected. Furthermore, major challenges faced over time by the organizations was correlated with
 - i. Style of decision making,
 - ii. Financial situation;
 - iii. Anticipated change and
 - iv. Organizational structure and the following coefficients of $r =$

35, $r = -.41$; $r = .51$ and $r = .21$ were obtained respectively.

Again apart from anticipated change and financial situation correlating positively and significantly with major challenges faced over time the rest coefficients though positive yet do not convey any information different from what was obtained in the other results above.

DISCUSSION

From the analysis of the data gathered and other relevant information obtained during the study, it does seem that the challenges facing managements of Nigerian organizations have been changing over time. The results tend also to indicate that while the challenges tend to become more complex and organizational environment more volatile, the old system of management style and- apparent insensitivity tend to hold sway. The fact that management style seem not to have changed over time as well as decision making and given the overwhelming opinion of the respondents that the structure has tended to be rigid despite the dynamic and organic nature of the environment, it could be opined that Nigerian managements seem not to be proactive and responsive. This situation could indeed be the major cause of the crisis ravaging the economy and many Nigerian organizations.

The general trend in contemporary management arena point to all inclusiveness, consultation and participation in the organizational scheme of things. However, the results of the study seem to indicate that most Nigerian managements tend to still perpetrate the old habits and behaviour of exclusion and command and control management which in the present circumstances seem to be inappropriate.

While from the results, some management seems to be aware of the possible challenges confronting, the results appear not to indicate a corresponding efforts to address the situation. The new order tend to demand enterprise management and culture, caring but demanding leadership, adoption of market oriented philosophy, innovation and creativity as well as initiative and pluralistic frame in thinking and action. Apparently, the results of the study appear to paint the picture that things seem to be going in the opposite direction. This state of affair would not seem to augur well for the organizations and the economy.

According to the empiricism principle; Miller (1984), the primary task of management is to think. The future and success of the organization is dependent on its ability to think clearly, critically and creatively. Obviously, this seems to be the critical issue of Nigerian organizations dealing with the present situation facing them.

The organizations obviously are faced with the challenge of repositioning their organizations and businesses. The problem however, is the fact that repositioning sometimes causes cognitive dissonance in view of the fact that such managements tend to be pulled between the old attitude and behaviour and a belief in the new philosophy of viewing organizational issues.

What the results of the study seem to be saying is that the contemporary crisis bedeviling Nigerian organizations and the economy appear to be predicated on the application of old management tools and systems to an entirely new dynamic and challenging environment that may not be easily susceptible to simplistic solutions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the increasing complexity of organizational environment in Nigeria and the daunting challenges arising therefore, the following recommendations are made.

1. Managements and managers of Nigerian organizations should develop a high threshold of perception in order to pick emerging cues before they become compounded.
2. There is absolute need for attitudinal and behavioral changes on the part of Nigerian organizations and their managements towards organizational issues hence proactivity and positivity in action and orientation should be the overriding philosophy.
3. There is need to develop new methods and system of analyzing and dealing with problems. The old methods of dealing with problems appear not to be working.
4. The organizations must sharpen their ability to think clearly, critically and creatively. There is need for more innovation and insight in the management of organizational affairs.
5. To cope effectively with exigencies, Nigerian organizations must invest more on research and development. Research and development are key to sustainable performance and therefore, to organizational survival

CONCLUSION

The challenges confronting managements of Nigerian organizations appear to be getting more sophisticated. This is because the environment under which the organizations are operating has become more volatile, more convulsive and totally unpredictable. The major problems appear to be the seeming inability of most Nigerian organizations to appropriately diagnose the problems and apply relevant solutions.

Going by the opinions expressed by the respondents, the situation does not seem to be getting better. In the circumstance, what may be required from the managements is total orientation and attitudinal disposition in the way challenges are conceived and handled.

On the whole, the conceptuality of the Nigerian organizations and the challenges they face call for an in depth and longitudinal study to be able to come up with appropriate recommendations and solutions.

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