

REPOSITIONING BUSINESS EDUCATION AND PRACTICE IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Business education, like any other field of study has its own guiding principles/ concept and procedures. This conceptual framework however, was not indigenous to Africa or Nigeria but rather was imported mostly from Britain and the United States of America. Therefore, there is need to constantly evaluate how these principles/concepts suit our local situation. However, the various institutions of business administration and management studies lagged behind in responding appropriately to the quality and types of management needed by the nation. The identified indicators of the tag are what this paper critically examined.

Keywords: Significance of business administration. Growth, functional, improve ethics and attitude to work

INTRODUCTION

One of the recent trends in Nigerian educational development is the increasing awareness of and interest in business education programmes at secondary and post-secondary levels. The fact is evidenced from the recognition by the Federal and State Governments of business education at the various levels of the school systems in Nigeria (National Policy on Education, 2004). Business education in the business world is the parent and foundation of business administration both in the classroom and outside world. As a parent and a foundation, unless business education is solid its offspring and superstructure, that is, business administration in both theory and practice will at best not achieve its potentials, and at worst will crumble.

This is more so in the light of the contextual issue facing the discipline in the present day Nigeria. Business represents a broad and diverse discipline that is included in all types of educational delivery systems. It can begin at any level. It can be interrupted for varying periods of time and can be continued throughout the life span of an individual. Business education includes education for office occupations, distribution and marketing occupations, business teaching, business administration and economic understandings. Its objective is to prepare entrepreneurs, managers, and employees for effective work relationship with the institutions of business and to give extension and rehabilitation education to those already employed in business occupations. This vocational objective is the distinctive feature of business education and its basic justification as a separate division of school discipline (Erickson, 2002).

The purpose of this study is to examine the purpose of business education in Nigeria, its current trend and implication for Nigerian economy. Currently, in Nigeria, apart from the agricultural sector where most Nigerian engaged in through the use of subsistence and traditional methods of production, most other sectors - government, foreign trade, and commercial/industrial (executive and manufacturing) depend on the use of modern technology. Despite all these, the wholesale adoption of modern management systems and the hiring of foreign expertise have become a culture in Nigeria. Nigerians seems to have failed so far, to manage properly both the human and material resources of this country.

But before one tries to suggest what business administration can do along this line of restructuring and resuscitating the economy; it is necessary to analyse how we go to the present unenviable economic predicament despite our abundant human and material resources. Why has the present economic travail arise? While one acknowledges the contributions of the world global recession in 2002 caused by the glut in crude oil (petroleum) among other factors. The main problem is not caused by a global factor but by a Nigerian or home made factor. Many Nigerians in positions of trust and at all levels (high, middle and low) of the public and private sectors have by commission or omission or both allowed the resources of this country to be stolen by Nigerians and their foreign collaborators, as to how it was done, Anao (1996) has enumerated the list of the ways as follows:

Gross inflation of contract, illegal remittance of foreign exchange through the loading of invoices, the creation of artificial scarcity through hoarding; the exploitation of labour force, unwillingness to pay tax, the sale of spurious goods, smuggling, collection of payments for work not done etc.

These sharp practices and omission of civil duties, rather than the global economic challenges, contributed more to the Nigerian present predicament. No economy could have withstand too long without crumbling under such battering from its citizens and their foreign collaborators.

Another factor that would continue to perpetuate the situation is the way business is conducted in Nigeria. It is manifested in the following way: rude behaviour of office staff, sales people, bank cashiers, receptionists, messengers and even managers, poor attitude towards work such as lateness, closing before time, malingering or loitering in or out of office during official hours, disturbing those willing to work by visits, telephone calls, wasting of resources, etc. With such attitudes to work, the public and private sectors are faced with severe difficulties. By and large, the main questions raised on the contextual issues are as:

1. How can tertiary institutions make Nigerians especially those in authority recognise the fundamental role of business administration to organisational survival in both the academic and practical work of the private and public sectors of the economy in Nigeria?
2. How can business administration continue its academic programmes in the

- face of the country's current economic predicament, which is likely to adversely affect all disciplines?
3. How can tertiary institutions use business administration to prepare its products (graduates) to combat the increasing challenges which job seekers face and would continue to face in the Nigerian economy where jobs are becoming scarce?
 4. How can business administration improve business ethics or attitudes to work of Nigerians generally and especially those graduates of administration who occupy various positions in public and private sectors of the economy?

All the contextual issues raised in this study are very crucial to the survival of business administration as a discipline and as a vocation in Nigeria. Nigerian citizens lived on false and faulty mono-cultural economic basis which boomed for a decade only to burst in their faces is most likely gone for ever, every individual, every discipline, every vocation has to appraise himself-herself, as the case may be, to find a new bearing for survival. Essentially, this is what the tertiary institutions should do directly.

Making Nigerians Recognise the Significance of Business Administration

It was gathered that the need of business administration was recognised during the era of industrial revolution in Britain in the 18th century, or thereabout. Even before then, one area of business administration, modern book keeping dates back to 1494 when Luca Pacioli, a Franciscan Friar in Venice published a system that he had been using in his tutorial work and in fact in common use in many parts of Italy. It is also gathered that its translation into English by John De Witt was published in London, fifty years later after which appeared in 1553, of an original English work by one J. Peeler, a citizen and Salter of London who gave his work the fascinating title: *The Manager and Form: How to Keep a Perfect Reckoning after the Order of the Most Worthy Accounting of Debit and Credit* (Urwick and Brech, 2001).

It was after several years in the middle of the seventeenth century that there appeared two or three notable books on the subject of book keeping and accountancy most of them dedicated to the companies of Merchant Adventurers. Urwick and Brech (2001) also state that rapid progress took place in the publication of books to match the progress made in merchantilism and industrial revolution to which it gave birth. What are the lessons of this brief reference to history? One may ask. It may be argued that those books do not constitute any real important contribution to the economic development of the period. They do, however, throw a useful light on the thinking of the business community of the times. They were essentially intended for instructional purpose of taking up a commercial career. They were a witness to the business philosophy of the period - the need for definite instruction in the principles and practice of commerce (Urwick and Brech, 2001). Going on, in Nigeria today are probes which are letting us into the secrets of the sharp practices perpetrated by our countrymen in the public sector of the economy together with their collaborators in the private sector in the booming days of yester-years. Today, we are living witnesses

of the consequences of such sharp practices. It is now left to us as academics of business administration to put the lessons down for posterity; the normative as well as actual business practices and of course, the future generations of Nigerians. We may be in a depressed era but it is a golden era for teaching and publishing of the significance of business administration for the survival of the economy and the nation.

In a depressed economy like ours, the academics can find out what needs to be done amongst its members and well wishers to write and publish conference papers which are sound, theoretically and practically. With such an approach, the society would be killing two birds with one stone: carrying on its academic engagement and publishing useful texts for professional and general education. By this approach, the academics would be directly making Nigerians especially those in authority recognise the significance of business administration.

Making Business Administration Grow Despite Economic Crunch

Many disciplines, like many industries, may fold up or diminish in their operations not because they are no longer needed, but because the infrastructures, capital, the spare parts, the raw materials necessary for their operation and/or continuation are beyond the resources of our economy at present. Business administration happens to be one discipline or rather an area of knowledge which cannot be adequately imparted without proper infrastructural facilities and equipment.

According to Oladujoye (2003), it is a known fact in the world that today's technological advancement is really having a very great impact on today's modern office. As a result, secretaries must be aware of these technological impacts as they affect their domain in the office. The awareness should not be delayed until they get their first job, rather the training programme preparing them for the secretarial position must start the awareness programme. The foregoing is supported by this testimony from a great American business administrator John Mills:

"I doubted that good business training could be conducted without actual office training! Behind grill work at high desks, perched on a stool and using facsimile account books and papers. I had the urge, therefore, to make use of the make-believe offices at the end of the room. I did in a small way. But I learned for the first time that for entirely successful work of this kind, some students must be free to man the offices at all periods so that students at the lowest levels of the course will be free to man the offices at all periods so that students at the lower levels of the course will be able to do business with those offices whenever transactions requiring it are reached" (Nicholas, 2000).

Unlike many academic courses which could be imparted with little or none of such facilities as teaching aids and/or equipment and which do not require practical in a real work situation, business administration courses can only be imparted with a sufficient amount of them (the aforementioned facilities). And the provision of such facilities is costing more and more in Nigeria. In the light of the depressed

state of the economy and the almost daily increasing cost of these facilities, what can the tertiary institutions do to make business administration grow?

It is obvious to state that the academics as a body and as individual members can do a lot by leading the way in purging the Nigerian society of some of its bad habits, which are destructive and also at variance with social and economic development. One of such habits is the throw-away and replaces rather than repair culture that was cultivated in the booming days of the economy. The other is the purchasing of machinery and equipment and which do not only require practical in a real work situation. Another is the purchasing of machinery and equipment at the most exorbitant prices for ulterior motives and the contracting out of every item of purchase including chalk and stationery.

According to Banghtery (2007), the academics should teach the Nigerian society how to stretch the life of our existing facilities (especially machinery) by introducing and teaching a new course on maintenance economics in which society will be taught to repair rather than unnecessary throw away expensively purchased materials. They must teach their students how to bargain hard in order to stretch the value of the Naira when purchasing items for their organisation. This new development is necessary to counteract the erstwhile prodigal pattern. It is on record that Nigeria was notorious for spending up to three or more times the amount other countries including richer OPEC members spend on the same items or object, for example, constructing roads and building and/or purchasing machineries and equipment. The days of such corrupt spending at unnecessarily inflated projects and objects are supposed to be over.

Business educators, in order to teach and inculcate in their students and by extension the generality of Nigerians, the habit of paying fair prices for goods and services, must do so by their personal and individual examples whenever they are purchasing materials and equipment for their courses. They must show, by personal examples, to their students, the art of honest hard bargain instead of perpetuating the recently learnt habit of inflating prices for personal benefits. Another task for these institutions is how it can make the discipline more functional.

Making Business Administration Functional in the Economy

Nigeria celebrated 50 years anniversary of her independence on October 1st 2010, despite the long years of full political self-piloting and regrettably, less so of the economic affairs of this nation. Nigeria has only facades and trappings of economic growth in the forms of modern technological products, managerial and administrative systems that have been imported to show for it. The intrinsic signs of real development which should be manifested in the ability of her citizens to invent their own technology; adapt the inventions or technology of others and innovate her own management and administrative systems are deficient or non-existent. Consequently, our economy is now more dependent not only on western industrial countries but also on some third world countries that we gained independence at the same period.

It was not long ago that we imported almost everything produced from other parts of the world including a category classified as essential commodities.

It is therefore very consoling to hear that the political authority of this country is addressing itself to the need for reconstructing the economy. Although we are yet to be told the details of such restructuring, many people do appreciate the fact that the economy needs considerable reconstruction in the face of the dwindling revenue from one source - oil - which no longer ensures economic development. The situation is worsened by the importation of unnecessary foreign good. The era of importation syndrome when virtually every product from the simplest one probably the toothpick, the most sophisticated machinery or equipment such as the latest microcomputer can no longer be sustained.

The restructuring may take any or all of these forms: diversification of the resources of this country into many productive areas especially the agricultural and industrial sectors; developing indigenous technology and utilising it to the full, in conjunction with the current practice of wholesale usage or adoption of foreign technology where it is not necessary to adapt or where it can't be adapted. It is time for every individual, every discipline, every association to come forward to participate in the task of restructuring the economy without which it (the economy) would worsen and our dependency on western industrial countries and indeed other third world countries be such that the majority of the citizens of this country would be impoverished more and more with the passage of each day.

How then can business administration as a discipline and we as business lecturers be helpful to the economy that cries out for restructuring? Indeed, we would lay firm foundation of the crucial role we can play and which we intended to play as shown in our teaching and conduct. Since one of the main problems of this country is not the dearth of good intentions but their dearth at implementation stage. A lien of approach is to devote attention to the working out of strategies for implementation of such good intentions. Anao (1996) has raised very important issues and solutions to them which are considered most pertinent. His solutions included:

- i Recognise entrepreneurship as a neglected item in training curricular and entrench it as a standard course in business school curricular.
- ii Design and market to the investing public course programmes which seek to inculcate the principles and techniques for identifying business opportunities and planning for their exploitation through business floatation.
- iii Incorporate in the curricular of business school and training institutions behaviours subjects such as psychology, sociology, national consciousness and awareness in order to enhance the standard of morality displayed in Nigerian business practices.
- iv Design a suitable body of theory, teaching materials and methodologies, which emphasise the socio-cultural peculiarities of Nigeria as a people.

The aforementioned recommendations are capable of enhancing the quality of business administration programmes, which in turn would have great impact on the

commercial and industrial sectors of the economy. The inclusion of courses on entrepreneurship in training curricular of business administration, is likely to affect positively the level of entrepreneurship growth in Nigeria. It is the opinion of this writer that the Nigerian business scene is still suffering from a low level of entrepreneurship. One still finds that it is over saturated by petty traders who are charting a Nigerian brand of petty commercial capitalism which is becoming more and more parasitic because of its pricing policy.

It is also becoming more and more dependent on manufactured goods imported from other countries. These petty traders, who dominated the commercial sector despite the relatively large amounts of money they are making from their customers, add little in 'real value' to the economy. This is so because traders form themselves into links in the chains of middlemen between the producers and the consumers. The entire link in the chain mark up the selling prices of goods they sell to the disadvantage(s) of the final consumer. One strongly feels that the lack of productive business opportunities has led many Nigerian into this lucrative but minimally productive sub-sector. The pertinent question is whether tertiary institutions have turned their eyes away from such situation? Is it doing something about it? One reason why many Nigerians troop into petty trading is due to the low level of entrepreneurship knowledge. If one person starts selling essential commodities in a neighbourhood, every other person irrespective of sex wants to do the same until the business is over saturated with participants.

The result is that the sub sector of petty trading is over-populated. If entrepreneurship is taught in all business administration programmes, its effect will be felt in many areas, including petty trading which badly needs reorganisation. For such, re-organisation is likely to displace many petty traders in the over-populated trade. If the knowledge of entrepreneurship is enhanced in the society those displaced from petty trading will be capable of breaking into new investment grounds. This is likely to happen if inclusion of entrepreneurship in the business administration curricular is followed by designing and marketing to the investing public course programmes, which seek to teach the principles and techniques for identifying business opportunities. This has twin advantages: it would improve the capability of business education institutions in raising funds, and it would also make the programmes more functional to an economy that is badly in need of restructuring and resuscitation. The last two recommendations would contribute to the improvement of general business practices in Nigeria.

Making Business Administration Improve General Business Ethics and Attitudes to Work

All the above points aimed at improving the general business ethics and attitudes to work of Nigerians in both the public and private sectors. For far too long, one has been disturbed by the existing business ethics and attitudes towards work which have contributed in no small way to our current depressed economy. Business culture

predicated on such values and practices as getting rich quickly through dubious, dishonest and dishonourable means, making minimum or no effort to earn profits and embarking on minimally or non-productive ventures, among others, have contributed to the present economic predicament in Nigeria.

Nigerians, therefore, would not need too much preaching to be convinced that such values and short-sighted practices which might have paid off yesterday have now landed some of them in Kirikiri today. It is honesty, sanctity of human life, etc that matter. In doing so, we should eschew the example of that good preacher who enjoined his listeners "Do what I say and not what I do"! That precept which is practised abundantly in this country has landed us where we are today. We must now learn to lead by example. As a final note, it has been suggested that in identifying economic practices that may affect business administration curriculum, one must look at the climate and environment in which the development is to take place.

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