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## AN ANALYSIS OF DEVELOPMENTS AND CHALLENGES CONFRONTING PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT PRACTICE IN NIGERIA

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**Abstract.** *This paper explores factors that aided the development of personnel management practices, as well as the challenges confronting the profession in Nigeria. The study made efforts to identify factors such as how industrial revolutions impacted both the industrialized and emerging countries. The study found that despite the fact personnel management practices have passed through several challenges, the challenges can be overcome. The study concluded that with appropriate human resources development, free from political interference in public service, personnel management as a discipline in Nigeria will go from strength to strength.*

**Keywords:** Politics, Training, Development, Human resources, Public Service.

**JEL Codes:** J5; L20

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### 1. Introduction

The concept of 'personnel' is associated with all persons who are engaged collectively in work organizations. The concept later changed to human resources. According to Ojo (2006), human resources refers to the energies, skills and knowledge of people who apply these in the manufacturing of goods and services. Human resources in contemporary times is considered an organizational asset owing to the realization of the tasks ahead of organizations operating within a complex and dynamic business environment. Organisations usually achieve their goals through an



effective workforce. For high-quality performance, an organization requires a fully committed workforce. For organizations to achieve purpose, they have to focus on the development of their human resources. Ologunde (2009) advances that for personnel to be committed within an organization, there will be a need for an explicit work design, good employees, training and development, job satisfaction as well as ensuring employees' well-being. The need for efficient personnel in organizations has increased in recent times. Sharma (2012), notes that people have peculiar physiological properties, abilities and limitations. All these require attention and resources, such as motivation, participation, satisfaction and incentives. Nevertheless, this paper is focused mainly on factors that influence the development of personnel management practices in Nigeria, whilst recommending ways to strengthen the practices in this respect.

### **Study objectives**

The study examined factors that drive effective personnel management in organizations. It also investigated problems that personnel management faces, whilst probing the role of political interference in the development of human capital in public office.

### **Research Methodology**

A qualitative *cum* theoretical research approach was adopted, as the study relied on secondary data. In other words, the study obtained information, using published and unpublished materials such as papers, conference papers and other printed materials. It is also pertinent to mention that the study obtained data that relates to the topic by interviewing some personnel practitioners and stakeholders.

### **Conceptual framework**

Like any other topic in the management sciences, the issue of personnel management, according to Ajayi (2000), is a specialized function that involves the use of certain procedures and techniques



that guarantee that organizations have the correct quantity of employees to engage in current and future operations.

Human management is focused on processes of obtaining, organising and motivating a workforce, whilst nurturing an operative environment that encourages unity of purpose amongst internal organizational stakeholders, which boosts the chances of enterprises meeting their legal and social responsibilities towards their stakeholders (Armstrong & Taylor, 2023). In the extant literature, Obisi (2015) contends that labour relations are focused on all aspects of managing an organisation's human resources. It involves deciding on the companies' resources, and the personnel's needs, recruiting and selecting the best available employees, growing, advising and paying deserving employees, creating liaisons and connecting the union with the government and generally showing concern for the well-being of staff. The major objective of personnel management in an organization is to facilitate organizational sustainability, which depends on efforts exerted by the workforce, as well as the directions given to them.

Ugwu (2007) explains that personnel management involves the investigation and development of ways in which individuals within the organization are managed to achieve the organization's objectives. The main objectives of personnel functions in work organizations, whether private or public organizations, include the following:

- i. To discover and retain efficient personnel,
- ii. To establish and sustain working conditions that will be conducive to optimal performance,
- iii. To advise top management of personnel needs from time to time,
- iv. To develop and constantly stimulate continuing awareness of human relations issues for effective managerial decision-making.
- v. To perform certain personnel services, such as training and skills development.



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The significance of personnel management can be seen in the organization's mission, which can only be achieved through the cooperation of the workforce. According to Sharma (2012), if employees avoid work, management may not be able to accomplish their targets. Therefore, to build a cooperative workforce, it is necessary to manage employees effectively. It is this management of people and their relationship with one another that is referred to as personnel management or human resources management (Sharma, 2012).

In concordance with the above, Mbeli (2009) agrees that personnel management is the process that brings together and takes proper care of both service men and women, enabling them to become progressive work partners. Mbeli (2009) further contends that the characteristics of personnel management include: (i) the capacity to select the right person for the right job; (ii) to motivate them to willingly play roles in the successful operations of the company; and (iv) to ensure a diligent workforce within an organisation (Mbeli, 2009).

Ologunde (2009) argues that personnel management in modern times supports the effective and efficient achievement of organizational objectives. However, members of top management must support the roles that personnel management plays in an organisation.

Personnel management carries three basic functions in an organisation, namely: (i) the administrative role, which involves processing and recording keeping, which is enhanced by the use of technology; (ii) the operational and employee advocate role, which relates to crisis management, dealing with diverse workers' issues; and (iii) the strategic roles of the workforce, which involves supporting the workforce to be innovative and future fit (Martins et al., 2006). In supporting the top management to accomplish the strategic goals of the organization, human resources management has become an increasingly major player in developing strategic plans, which must clearly reflect the organization's strategies in terms of people, profit, quality and organizational sustainability (Armstrong, 1980).



## Theoretical framework

This is an intellectual concept that focuses on propositions and taxonomies. It deals with insightful and well-informed awareness that forms the basis upon which social phenomena can be analyzed to provide a clear understanding of the issue under investigation. It is on this basis that the study is anchored on human relations theory to analyze these apparent factors that have stimulated the development of personnel management in a developing country like Nigeria.

The human relations approach explores individuals operating collectively. Elton Mayo (1880–1949) is generally believed to be the pioneer of both human relations and the industrial sociology movement. He and his team conducted research at Harvard University, demonstrating how groups influence individuals' attitudes at work.

It should be noted that the human relations approach brings to management's attention the important roles that individuals play in determining an organization's success or failure (Armstrong, 1980; Armstrong & Taylor, 2023). Thus, the human relations approach believes that management should recognize employees' needs within a social work environment. They also emphasize that non-monetary rewards play an important role in the workplaces in motivating workers. Sharma (2012) identified some of the key elements of the human relations approach:

- (i) Individuals reflect different attitudes and characters, as well as ways of life.
- (ii) Informal work groups exist within the organization.
- (iii) Participative management, which involves workers in decisions affecting them, is the key.

This current study is positioned within the context of the human relations school because personnel management functions are organizationally based. It exists within an established institution. Again, the personnel management function is interactive, since the personnel manager



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influences decision-making within the organization and is in turn influenced by individual workers and unions that exist in the organization in a bid to achieve a harmonious working environment.

### **Personnel Management Development in Nigeria**

In 1861 Lagos was annexed and became a crown colony. This resulted in the evolution of Nigeria. Neighbouring areas were gradually incorporated into the British Empire (Akinboye et al., 2015). The country has a distinct socio-cultural and socio-historical past with several socio-cultural patches (Otite, 2012). Nigeria's development problems are many and very complex, which extend to the economy, agriculture, technology, socio-structure, political structures, physical and human resources development and utilization (Agagu, 2004).

Personnel management, as a discipline, has existed in Nigeria for a long time. When the subsistence nature of the economy transformed into a commercial economy, wage employment gained momentum. Consequently, labour relations developed, prompting organizations to appreciate the key role of personnel functions in the workplace in Nigeria (Lawal, 2012). Nigeria has a huge human resources-derived nation with a large population, which is yet to be fully exploited for development and growth. However, one of the problems affecting human resources development in Nigeria is the challenges of nepotism, corruption, and the federal character requirement in the selection of candidates, which is a formula that enthroned mediocrity through a kind of ethnic selection (Olaokun, 1997). Since independence, personnel management in Nigeria has witnessed tremendous evolution due to expanding industrialization and commercialization. This trend necessitated the provision of adequate on-and-off-the-job training for managers occupying personnel management positions (Lawal, 2012).

### **A Critical Analysis of the Development of Personnel Management Practices in Nigeria**



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The development of personnel management practices can be traced to Britain due to the Industrial Revolution which made workers gather in large numbers into industrial organization, as known as the factory system. From Britain, it spread to other countries across the globe. Personnel management as a profession was first evident in the United Kingdom from 1700 to 1785, when masons, carpenters, leather workers and other craftsmen formed into groups (Armstrong, 1980; Armstrong & Taylor, 2023)) and used their unity to improve their working conditions. They became the forerunners of trade unions. Certainly, some have to coordinate and negotiate with these unions, which forms part of the role of personnel management. Also, the field of personnel management developed further with the spread of Industrial Revolution which witnessed the development of a new and complex industrial society. The genesis of the Industrial Revolution can be traced to the period when tedious hand labour was replaced with machinery and steam power, introducing remarkable changes in working conditions and social patterns (Armstrong, 1980). Ojo (2006) identified interrelated factors that led to the emergence of personnel management practices below:

- I. The Industrial Revolution in 18th century England, when the country became the business centre of the world, stimulated its spread to industrial centres across Europe and North America.
- II. Collective bargaining, the use of wage labour and the inhumane treatment of workers inevitably gave rise to the formation of trade unions. The latter, coupled with the practice of collective bargaining, increased personnel management activities.
- III. Several publications in the area of industrial psychology covering testing for employment, interviews, job placements, promotions, grading systems and job analyses contributed to the development of personnel management.



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- IV. The growth of industrial sociology, which emphasized group norms, the need for group interaction and acceptance, and the need for good social relations on the job, which were underlined in different organizations supported the growth of personnel management.
- V. The effect of World War 1, which necessitated hiring several thousands of workers in production factories, eventually led to the establishment of numerous departments in industry including personnel management.
- VI. Government personnel practices: in 1833 the Federal Civil Service was established in the United States (US), patterned on the British civil service system. Both services provided competitive examinations to enter the service to secure tenure. These principles had a positive impact on the growth of labour relations public sector, which is the province of personnel management.
- VII. The development of business education: the tremendous expansion of education opportunities in the US and Britain during the 18th century produced a more enlightened labour force. The first business school, Wheaton School, was established in 1883 at the University of Pennsylvania, followed by the introduction of a Master of Business Administration in 1908 at Harvard University in the US. This changed the frontier and practice of personnel management through the training and development of personnel specialists.
- VIII. Welfare movement: this was introduced in the US towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The objective was to improve the welfare of employees and to engender loyalty aimed at productivity, enhancement of personnel management practices, and so on. This was also imperative for personnel management development in Nigeria as well.

At a national level, Fajana (2006) notes that personnel management was first called labour administration in Nigeria, and during that period, there was no specialized department to cater for workforce needs. The onset of colonial rule in the country in the late 19th century resulted in the





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changing of the name to labour and staff administration, while personnel management was later used when people experts began to recognize people as social beings as a direct consequence of the pioneering works of Elton Mayo in the first quarter of the 19th century. However, in the 1980s, the concept changed human resources management. Human resources management allows for flexibility, effective management of human resources, and cost maximization.

Lawal (2012) identified five factors that aided the growth of personnel management practices in Nigeria. Firstly, the development of the personnel function can be traced to the substitution of huge reliance on subsistence farming with economic and commercial organization that led to wage employment in the country during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Another factor that led to the growth of personnel management, as a function staffed by a specialist, was the emergence of a voluntary organization protecting the interests of workers. This organization became known as a trade union, which played a major role in improving the general conditions of workers, prompting organizations to consider the personnel function to interact with them.

Thirdly, the activities of the federal Ministry of Labour can also be regarded as part of the personnel management function. The ministry has made useful suggestions for organizations to employ personnel specialists who will connect the company with the ministry regarding union issues.

Fourthly, the establishment of the Nigeria Employers Consultative Association (NCCA) has also had a profound effect on the development of personnel management in the country. The association's periodic newsletter provides useful information about personnel management.

Finally, the personnel management function witnessed tremendous growth in the country through the introduction of the indigenization policy in the 1970's. The indigenization of personnel



management positions, the promotion of adequate on-and-off-the-job training for managers occupying personnel management positions, and attaching considerable importance to personnel functions, have exemplified the development of personnel management in Nigeria, since independence.

Ojo (2006) identified several other factors that have influenced the development of personnel management in Nigeria as listed below:

- i. Trade unions: Like developed countries, the development of the trade union movement contributed to the development of personnel management in Nigeria.
- ii. Increases in wage employment, in turn, gave impetus to unionism, a collective instrument to improve working conditions.
- iii. Labour and industrial relations legislation affected the development and practice of personnel management.
- iv. Activities of the labour ministry, which was established in 1942 primarily owing to the government's concern about the rationalization of civilian personnel in the country, accelerated the development of personnel management in Nigeria, which included departmental officials guiding general managers and personnel assistants in labour matters as well as disputes. This encouraged employers to recruit persons who could advise them about labour issues, whilst functioning as the link between the company and the labour ministry in terms of union matters.
- v. Development of management education: the country benefitted from the spread of American management education that commenced with the establishment of the Department of Business Administration at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, in 1961. Also, Business Education commenced at the University of Lagos in 1960 and in 1963 the MBA Programme was instituted at the university. These developments enhanced the development of personnel management practices in Nigeria.



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- vi. The role of the private sector: the private sector also played a notable role in promoting the frontier of management education in Nigeria. The Nigerian Employers Consultative Association (NECA) was formed as a federation of employees and employers in 1957. The association has had a meaningful effect on the development of personnel management in Nigeria, particularly through two of its committees, namely the Industrial Relations Committee and the Training and Education Committee.
- vii. Also in 1961, the Nigerian Management Group, later named the Nigerian Institute of Management (NIM), was established as part of efforts to lay the foundation of management education in Nigeria. In 1968 the Personnel Management Association of Nigeria was created and subsequently changed to the Institute of Personnel Management of Nigeria in 1973. The institute's main objective is to stimulate science and practice all aspects of labour relations. This is done by fostering research into the science of personnel management, whilst promoting and disseminating information on issues that burden personnel matters. Several other private institutions and associations have contributed in various ways to the development of personnel management in Nigeria.
- viii. Role of the public sector: the federal government has boosted development agencies. The Industrial Training Fund was established in 1971, making it compulsory for all industrial establishments that employed 25 or more people to contribute a percentage of their annual wage. Equally, the Centre for Management Development (CMD) was established in 1993 to coordinate activities and to provide proper direction to institutions that engaged in the training and retraining of management personnel in Nigeria. The CMD has trained many management educators and trainers for private organizations. The federal government also established the Administrative Staff College of Nigeria (ASCON) in 1973 to promote higher management training for the growth of executives for the public service.
- ix. Another important factor that instigated the development of personnel management practice in Nigeria is automation. Automation, especially computerization, has affected



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personnel management through the need to adjust policies and practices to meet its demands. Automation leads to job restrictions as many jobs were eliminated whilst others were created (Maduabum, 2014).

While emphasizing the current state of personnel management practices, Olowu and Adamolekun (2015) noted that *“human resources management has become important for all organizations in an age of global competition in which all large-scale organizations must compete for resources whether they are governmental or non-governmental organizations. This has also made it even more essential to secure and manage human resources as the most critical resource of any organization”*. They added that the practical significance of the new human resources management focus in Africa’s public administration systems is that it emphasizes the need for a changing workforce department in the public sector establishments from an obsession with positive or even negative administration roles to actively developing strategic expertise. It also calls attention to the need to develop a professional approach rather than to treat it as a tangential responsibility that can be managed by anyone who cannot otherwise be productively engaged in the organization.

Ologunde (2009) illuminates that human beings are the most valuable asset in any organization, while the labour relations function plays a vital role in quality management to produce quality products and services, and employees must be of a high quality, developed and motivated to engage with and produce quality outputs. They should be recognized and rewarded for doing so, whilst also given the authority and responsibility to make critical decisions, when necessary. Hence, there is a need to increase the use of the principle of industrial democracy. This will impact positively on human resources management in organizations in Nigeria.



Arene (1997) emphasizes that certain success factors in human resources management in Nigeria are critical for adoption, as shown below:

- I. Treating determined employees as assets is important to attain organizational and corporate objectives.
- II. The re-invention of human resource development as a strategic tool to transform people into intellectual capital, as the future will certainly demand performance in technology, creative vision, entrepreneurship, customer satisfaction and continuous improvement.
- III. De-politicization of critical appointments, assigning processes to innocuous politics and isolating certain critical positions for the best candidate for the necessary value-added contributions to effect improvements and changes to propel the country forward.
- IV. Training and re-training for 21st-century management based on Total Quality Management (TQM). This is because the TQM strategy unleashes workers' creativity, initiative and potential. It recommends that leaders should manage employees to become coaches and facilitators, whilst they should motivate workers to perform profitably.

However, personnel management practices in Nigeria face challenges, which have hampered the country's development.

Lawal (2012) identified these critical challenges as presented below:

- Balancing personnel policies for indigenes and expatriates who hail from different environments and who are subjected to varied remuneration packages.
- Some personnel managers are 'old breed' and may lack the required training to cope with modern personnel problems.
- Uneducated and poorly educated union officials' input affects negotiations in large matrix-structured organizations.
- A myriad of Nigerian factors like tribalism and nepotism affect merit-based recruitment and selection.



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Obisi (2015) argues that personnel management practice faces the challenge of a lack of expertise owing to the narrow-mindedness of personnel specialists. This is because personnel specialists live in an idealist world and always fail to translate their concepts and programmes into significant contributions that align with the organizational goals. In addition, personnel management is plagued by several problems ranging from power images to a lack of professionalism.

Human resources is always the last to respond to the thud at the door for change, since human resources practices are usually characterized by traditional management paradigms, for example, bondage to history in the sense “of the way it was done”, noting that human resources practices are also usually characterized by the stoutest defenders of obsolete methods and sacred cows and the most resistant to change in an ever-changing word (Arene,1997).

### **Conclusion and recommendations**

This study has endeavoured to explore various factors that have influenced the development of personnel management practices in Nigeria. As can be seen, the growth of the field of personnel management was stimulated by the industrial revolution in Europe, and the need to maintain an effective workforce, because large numbers of employees work in organizations. Personnel management as a profession started in Europe and North America before spreading to the African continent. Personnel management practices took root in both Nigeria’s public and private sectors during colonial rule because of the introduction of wage labour, the setting up of labour unions, and the application of the principle of collective bargaining in the public and private sectors, coupled with the introduction of business education, the formation of personnel management associations and the creation of research institutes dealing with personnel management issues. From the above analysis, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance the development of personnel management in Nigeria:



- i. Human resources managers should be trained continuously to be able to cope with modern management issues such as pension contributions, health insurance and other contemporary complex matters.
- ii. The increasing use of technology in organizations' processes has led to a change in how various organizations conduct their businesses, using devices such as computers, smartphones, answering machines and security devices. Hidden cameras are essential for personnel managers in both public and private institutions in contemporary times.
- iii. Welfare packages in organizations (public and private) are advocated, as this will help to achieve a good organizational climate, industrial harmony and high productivity. It will also lessen the problem of occupation conflict and present a favourable environment in which personnel management practitioners can operate.
- iv. The involvement of personnel managers in the organization's decision-making is vital as they can play pivotal roles in achieving the organization's goals owing to their effectiveness and goal-oriented approach to the business.
- v. Finally, a dynamic and composite personnel policy is essential to reduce an organization's social problems. Policies that encourage nepotism, statism and undue favouritism must be avoided.

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