Employees Grievance Handling Mechanism in Nigeria Public Sector under the New Public Management

By

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Abstract

Grievances are inevitable in organizations especially the public sectors. The insensitivity and non sustainable action towards workers by the management and government leads to employee grievances in the public service. This paper examined the effect of the effective employee grievance handling process at the public service under the new public management in Nigeria. Secondary source of data was employed. It was discovered that grievances lead to staff absenteeism, low level of staff commitment amongst others which affects employee performance and organizational growth. The paper recommended that, the management should improve the working environment and ensure workers salary, rewards and incentives, promotion are attended to and paid as at when due while grievance reported should not be undermined.

Introduction

Public sector organization in a broader concept incorporates both core civil service organizations and the public service organizations. The increasing expectations of the public from public sector organizations has diversified the scope, increased the functions and broadened the concept of public sector organizations (Dube, 2011).

Nigeria public service plays a vital role in many governmental activities. The main aim of the public service is to provide good governance, production and distribution of goods and services within the country. Good governance is important for developing countries. In Nigeria, the civil service is the administrative arm of the government. It's the organ or agent that helps the government work properly. (Ejiofor, 1983). However, from the mid 1970s, the Nigeria public service began to exhibit signs of progress decay over centralization, growing conflict between cadres and hierarchy, low staff morale and productivity (Joe, 2019). A new approach to public management [NPM] was introduced to replace the traditional management (Robinson, 2015).

The new public management is a movement that has been sweeping across the globe since 1980s. It was introduced to maximize effective management and efficiency of public sector organizations. Since its arrival, it has enormously transformed management of public sector organizations across the globe, with special attention in effectiveness and efficiency. The new public management initiative emerged out of Thatcherism in Britain in 1979 and Reaganism in U.S. A in 1980 (Dahida and Ahmed, 2013). The NPM has six main components (i) productivity, which is aimed at how government can provide more services with less money; (ii) marketization, which is focused on how government can eliminate the inadequacies of its bureaucracy, using market-style incentives to change the behavior of government managers (iii) service orientation, which is about putting the citizens who in a market situation are customers first, encourage customer oriented approach to service provision (iv) decentralization, which gives room for devolution of responsibilities for various programmes, in order to lower the levels of government and reduce bureaucracy; (v) policy role separation from service delivery, instead of doubling as both services provider and purchaser; and (vi) accountability, which focuses on delivering government promises with more attention and interest in outputs and outcomes, instead of process and structures (Kent, 2005).

The Public service is the machinery of government that is concerned with the delivery of goods and services by the government through effective productivity. Productivity is the key factor in the development and economic prosperity of the nation. It is the positive contribution of an individual to an organization or system

to the multi-furious need of the nation (Nwanolue and Iwuoha). Employees are important assets to every organization and the cordial relationship among the staff and management or employers enhance effective productivity. The existence of grievances in organization is inevitable but the improper handling of grievances leads to disruption of work in the form of work to rule, demonstration, violence, strike and resignation which ultimately amount to labour turnover effect on the organization. Also an organization wishing meaningful productivity and improved labour management relationship must design, adjust an equitable grievance handling system, (Ohiri, 2002).

Grievance is sign of an employee's discontent with his job or his relationship with colleagues. It arise out of day to day working relations in an organization. In an organization, grievance may be presented by an employee or group of employees, with respect to any measure or situation that directly affects the individual or is likely to affect, the conditions of employment of many workers. Grievance is specific, formal dissatisfaction expressed through an identified procedure (Gupta, 2006).

Grievance which affects the employee productivity in the public service manifest in such negative behavior as absenteeism, unfriendliness, high labour turn over and many others. Grievances are not one sided issue. Management can also have a number of grievances against individual employees or the entire work force. Management grievance border on general indiscipline, disregard for rules and regulation, order and safety regulations, lazy work habits, general inefficiency and irresponsibility and union violation of contract agreement and failure of union to live up to promise and expectation. Others include misrepresentation of management to workers by leaders and interferences in areas of decision making considered the prerogative of management such as promotions.

Effective grievance management is an essential part of personnel management; It is the management process of handling the grievances that occurred in a work place in more productive way. It ensures a peaceful harmonious work environment because it redresses the grievances in mutual satisfaction of both the employee and the managers and help the management to frame policies and procedures acceptable to the employees (Longe, 2015).

Definition and Forms of Grievance

A grievance is any dissatisfaction or feeling of in justice in connection with one's employment situation that is brought to the attention of management (Beach, 1980). Also Dwivedi (2009) see grievance as any discontent or dissatisfaction, whether expresses or not and whether valid or not, arising out of anything connected with the organization which an employee thinks, believes, or even feels is unfair, unjust or inequitable.

No matter the favourable climate of employers and employees, they must have problems, some of these problems emanate from the employers themselves either because they have treated the employees unfairly or they have failed to take into account the likely reactions of workers to changes. Problems can also arise from the employees being difficult, uncooperative, ineffective, careless, wasteful or dishonest.

In any organization, there are myriads of situations that can give rise to employee and employer anxiety, conflict and complaints (Okoh, 2013). More importantly, the proper handling of all forms of workers problems emanating from the work situation determine the harmony in the organization. Due to frequent occurrence of employee grievance in the recent time, this paper tends to examine the causes, the handling mechanism and the effect of grievances on the organization. Also, to make useful recommendations that will enhance tranquility in the organization.

Forms of Grievances

According to Ichniowski (1984) andOkoh (2013), grievances may take any of the following forms:

1. **Factual**

When an employee is dissatisfied with his job, for genuine reasons like a breach of terms of employment or other reasons that are clearly attributed to the management, it is considered as factual grievances. This factual grievance arises when legitimate needs are unfulfilled. The problem is real and virtual.

2. **Imaginary**

Grievance is imaginary when an employee's grievance or dissatisfaction is not because of any factual or valid reason but because of wrong perception, wrong attitude or wrong information. Though it is not the fault of management, the responsibility of dealing with it rests with the management. So the problem is not real, it is the mind or just a feeling towards someone or something.

3. **Disguised**

An employee may have dissatisfaction for reasons that are unknown to himself. This may be because of pressure and frustrations that an, employee is feeling from other sources like his personal life. For instance reflecting the day mood at home to the workplace.

Causes of Grievance

Grievances are complaints of any kind raised by employees against management on a number of issues such as:

a. Grievances arising from the general working condition. Working condition refers to the working environment and to the non-pay aspects of an employee's term and conditions of employment. It covers such matters as the organization of work and work activities, health, safety and well being; implementing occupational health programmes, managing stress, preventing accidents, availability of proper tools and machine etc (Armstrong, 2003). When these are not available, the employees are bound to aggrieved and complain.

b. Wage and allowance adjustment, methods of pay and incentive system grievances. It also include: discharge, lack of opportunities for career growth and Hostility towards trade unions amongst others.

c. Grievances relating to seniority and discharge such as loss, calculation and interpretation of ranks and seniority, disciplinary discharge.

d. Supervision of grievances which include severity and application of disciplinary actions by supervisors for any reasons and complaints on general methods of supervision (Okoh, 2013).
e. Collective bargaining grievances which relate to allegation of violations and interpretations of contracts by management, delays in effecting settlement of collective agreements, management disregard of precedents and failure. of management to live up to promise.

Grievances may sometimes be confused with conflict or dispute. It is the grievance that turns into conflict if not handled sensitively and on time. Conflict is the spoken form of grievance.

Grievance **Redressing Machinery**

Grievance redressing mechanism actually gives the employees an opportunity to express their dissatisfaction and free themselves of the tension and frustration of discontentment. Any management with a progressive outlook that does not believe in the philosophy of autocratic management of employees is likely to have sort of grievance redressing machinery for fair, open-minded prompt action on grievance (Nupur, 2017).

Feature of Sound Grievance Procedure

A good grievance procedure help management understand the feelings and attitude of the workers concerning the organizations policies, practices and rules, thereby helping them to make necessary improvement in policies and rules. It also serves as a medium for upward communication to organization top management, and make them become more aware of employee's frustrations, problems and general expectation. It helps an employee to release the pressures that has accumulated of grievances. It also serves as a tool for management to maintain an open and harmonious relationship with the employees within the workplace (Juneja, 2018).

According to (Gupta, 2006) effective grievance procedure entails the following:

1. Legal Sanctity

Procedure should be designed to conform to the existing law as a supplementary statutory provision. It should make use of machinery provided under legislation.

The procedure may be incorporated in the standing orders or code of ethics or collective bargaining agreement of the organization.

2. Acceptability

The grievance procedure must be acceptable to all and should be developed with mutual consultation among management, workers and the union. In order to be generally acceptable, it must ensure a sense of fair play and justice to workers; reasonable exercise of authority to managers; and reasonable participation to the union.

3. Promptness

The grievance procedure must aim at speedy redressal of grievance. This can be ensured in the following ways:

a. As far as possible the grievance should be settled at the lowest level.
b. There should be only one appeal
c. Time limits should be prescribed and rigidly enforced at each level.
d. Different types of grievances may be referred to appropriate authorities.

4. Simplicity

The procedure should consist of few steps as possible. Channels for handling grievances should be carefully developed. Employees must know the officers to be contacted at each level. Information about the procedure should be communicated to the employees.

5. Training

Superior and union representatives should be given training in grievance handling. This will help to ensure effective working of the grievance procedure.

6. Follow-up

The working of the grievance procedure should be reviewed at periodical intervals. Necessary improvements should be made to make the procedure more effective.

In the same vein, according to Obiekwe and Eke (2019); indicator of good grievance mechanism should indicate both the awareness of the mechanism's

existence and confidence that its providence, provides a credible first avenue of recourse.

- A reduction, overtime in the number of grievances pursued through other non-judicial mechanisms, NGOs or the media.
- Decreases of the number of grievances of similar nature overtime. The mechanisms enable the staff to learn from past mistakes and adapt the practice or operating procedures where appropriate.
- A reduction in absenteeism and staff turnover and increase productivity among workers. It acts as a partial indicator of reduced worker grievances and improved worker satisfaction, most relevant in relation to supply of needs.
- Standard operating procedures indicating that lessons for management systems are being learnt and integrated to reduce the likelihood of the same kind of grievances recurring and also ensure justice in management of employee grievances and helps managers to be their decision on ethical codes of conduct.

The Importance of Grievance Procedure

The need for establishing grievance procedures in organizations have been very significant for the following reasons:

1. Grievance handling system serves as a legitimate, officially approved way of making their complaints known to high management for possible solution as it prevents employees from keeping their grievance bottled up until they eventually explode through a strike.
2. The reason for establishing a formal grievance handling procedure is to help to bring employee problem to the attention of higher management. This makes it possible for management to be aware of employee frustrations, problems and expectations in the organization and thus become more sensitive to employee well-being and needs (Okoh, 2013).
3. Grievance handling system reduces arbitrary actions or decision by supervisors or managers for the fear that the employee can protest against such actions and appeal to higher authority.
4. It affects productivity positively as the procedure guarantees the employee the right to be heard .and when he exploits this labour right to resolve a grievance, he feels happy and his morale improves.

5. This system helps the employees to resolve their difficulties with the organization by providing opportunity for two or more management representatives to listen to their complaints.
6. The grievance procedure is a demonstration that the workers are important in the organization and the organization cares about them and management are ready to listen to them (Stewart & Brown 2014).

Grievance Settlement Procedure

The main stages through which a grievance may be handled are as follows:

The Stage I

The aggrieved employee raises the matter with his immediate supervisor or management. He may be accompanied by a fellow employee or member of the union executive. The supervisor or manager should endeavour to solve the grievance as quickly as possible bu t not later than one week. This stage is very important. It is therefore necessary to give managers and supervisors some formal training in the tactics of conducting grievance interviews which may involve the following stages:

a. Listen carefully, intelligently and with sympathy to the employee's side of the story.
b. Define the problem with the employee by asking probing questions to elicit relevant facts and feelings.
c. Summarize the facts from time to time and from stage to stage in the process of the interview to ensure mutual understanding. Do not pass any judgement at this stage.
d. Attempt to get at the root causes of the grievance.
e. Conclude the interview. Try to get the interviewee to summarize the problem and suggest a possible solution.
f. After the formal interview, cross check the facts obtained where necessary and meet any other parties or persons involved for additional information.
g. From available facts and information, consider actions that could be taken to resolve the grievance and assess the consequences of such actions on the aggrieved and the organization.
h. Take the decision. Ensure that all facts and actions are documented in case

the need to appeal arises.

Stage II

If the employee is not satisfied with the decision and response of his immediate supervisor or manager, he has the right to appeal to the head of Department or other appropriate Senior Manager who will be expected to hear the grievance again. At his discretion arrange a personal interview with the aggrieved officer and will give a written reply to die latter within (5) working days.

Stage III

If the employee is still not satisfied with the decision at the second stage, he may appeal to the Executive Director or Managing Director, who will arrange to hear the appeal. The meeting to hear this appeal is held within a reasonable time (5 working days) of the request and is attended by the Director, the personal managers, the employee making the appeal and if he desires any other employee or member of the union executive. The personnel manager records the result of this meeting in writing and communicates the same to all concerned.

Stage IV

Usually, it is expected, that most of the cases be solved at stage III but in exceptional circumstances where this is not but matter remains unresolved, the aggrieved officer may present it in writing to the secretary, Public Service Commission who will handle the matter and give a written reply within a further fourteen' (14) working days.

The Effects of Effective Grievance Handling Procedure at Public Organizations

1. Efficient grievance handling process enhances employee performance in the organization thereby leading to increase productivity.
2. Grievance handling procedure reduced the tendencies for unnecessary pressure, confusion as well as other unsettled animosity in the organizations.
3. Grievance handling procedure provides the organization j. with an opportunity to update and constantly promote and maintained customer and employee satisfaction
4. Grievances handling procedure increases higher organizational

profitability and productivity, facilitates information sharing system.

5. Grievance handling mechanisms facilitates and increases the peace and harmony of employee working environments which results in employee's creativity which can be seen in increasing level of innovative practices in the organization.
6. Grievances handling procedure enables employee in solving the several challenges which the employee faces in the organization as it ensure a peaceful resolution of the interpersonal conflict and dispute in the organization.
7. Grievance handling procedures enhances employee's commitment and increases employee's acceptance of responsibility.

Theory of Pluralism

The pluralist industrial relations school of thought traces back to Sidney and Beatrice Webb in England (Coase, 1984). According to them there are different interests and interest groups at work place. For instance, the employers and their association's interest is higher productivity and loyalty etc, Employees and Unions interest is higher pay and job security whereas the government and its various agencies look for more taxes and industrial peace for economic growth and development.

And, the above interests are opposed to each other thereby creating perpetual conflict of interest in this tripartite relationship in the industrial relations system. Such difference account for the divergent orientations in economic, political, ideological, religious, racial, ethnic, gender and gerontocratic values among the members of work community.

Each of the sub-groups tries to seek domination by mounting pressure for purpose on the appropriate authorities that are instrumental to the realization of these goals. The primary objective of industrial relation practitioner here is to try and resolve the conflicts arising within and between the different interest sub-groups on continuous basis.

Conclusion

Employee's grievance remains an inevitable aspect of most modem organization. The ability of management to effectively manage the challenges goes a long way in determining various process in the organization in terms of improved performance, productivity, profitability, efficient, effectiveness, employee turnover and expansion tendencies in the organization.

Employees' grievances in the Nigeria public service affect low level of commitment, satisfaction, staff turnover and staff absenteeism. Grievances result from lack of conducive working environment, wages and allowance adjustment, allegation and interpretation of contract of employment

Efficient grievance handling process increase the level of public servant adherence to policies and practices thereby resulting to the increase achievement of organizational goal and objectives. The major challenges in handling grievance basically lie in die lack of required or needed skill to effectively manage the process. Therefore the need for good communication system between the supervisors and their staff in order to enhance the understanding of employee grievances.

Grievances can result in a big loss to the organization. It must be solved at the initial stage before it converts into dispute or conflict

Recommendations

The following are recommended, to improve organizational managerial process toward grievance management.

1. Management should never undermine any grievance presented to them by the employee as it may impact negatively on the employee morale and commitment to the organization.
2. Management should device early discovering grievance channels in order to rip the issue in the bud by placing suggestion boxes on the organization premises, operating open door policy and conducting employees quitting or exit interview for the employees quitting the organization in order to gain information about their reasons for leaving.
3. Management should ensure that the grievance handling procedure is

flexible and prompt to accommodate change occasioned by organizational factors.

4. Management should often ensure that it generates all the relevant facts needed to make informed judgment and decisions on any specific grievance presented to it.
5. Management should improve the working environment and ensure workers promotion, reward and incentives, workers salary are as when due.
6. Management should ensure continuous training of employees in order to equip them with the needed skill required for the organizational improvement and advancement.
7. Organization should put efforts to keep its employee's motivation and increase its employees morale.

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