

E-Administration and Organisational Communication for Service Delivery in Nigerian Civil Service: An Appraisal



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Abstract

The administration of governmental business over the years has been an object of criticism because of its mode of operation which has affected service delivery. To tackle the problem of inefficiency, the adoption of the E-administration system became imperative with the aim to improve efficiency, accessibility, and transparency in the Nigerian civil service. Service delivery to a greater extent cannot be achieved without effective communication. Consequent upon this, the study seeks to critically appraise the roles of E-administration in organisational communication with particular reference to the Nigerian civil service. Modernisation theory was adopted as the theoretical framework and data for the study were sourced from secondary sources. The findings reveal that E-communication has contributed positively to effective/efficient communication in the Nigerian civil service. Also, the study indicated that there are underlying challenges affecting its smooth/full operations such as technological infrastructure. Accordingly, the study recommends that since this is the new normal, proper technological infrastructure that enhances E-administration should be put in place in government offices for effective and efficient service delivery.

Keywords: *Administration, Organization, Communication, E-administration, Service delivery.*

Introduction

In an age where the rapid advancement of technology is reshaping the global landscape, Nigeria, as one of the most populous nations in Africa, stands at the threshold of a digital transformation that promises to revolutionize its public administration and governance. The advent of Electronic Administration (E-administration) has heralded a new era, marked by the fusion of technology and the machinery of government, aiming to enhance efficiency, transparency, and citizen engagement. E-administration is a part of e-

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government that handles internal administration within the government instead of external users such as citizens and businesses. The civil service, an institution at the heart of governmental policy formulation and implementation, influences in no small ways, the success or failure of governments. This is why the civil service of any nation is generally regarded as the pivot that will promote socio-economic and political development (Oyeleran-Oyeyinka, 2006). E-administration can also be defined as an application of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to support and improve office administrative tasks for effective and efficient service delivery.

In recent years, the advent of technology has given rise to various advancements, including e-governance system that aims to transform traditional public administration into more efficient and inclusive processes. Nigeria, like many other countries, has embraced e-administration as a means to enhance public service delivery and promote transparency. In today's rapidly evolving global landscape, information and communication technologies have catalyzed substantial transformations across various sectors. One of the most significant areas that have witnessed these technological revolutions is the realm of governance and public administration. E-administration, an innovative approach to public administration that leverages digital technologies, has become a critical tool for enhancing the efficiency, transparency, and accessibility of government services. ICT has also helped in the gathering and dissemination of government information (Ngonso, 2021a)

Communication plays a vital role in any functional organisation. Communication occupy a special place in every given society because of the special roles it plays. Communication is the life of society, the engine room that propels the societal system. The substance of communication helps people to respond positively to their environment (Ngonso, 2021b; Ngonso et al, 2023a; Ekhareifo &Ngonso, 2013; Ngonso,2023b). It remains an integral part of organisational management, the success of an organisation largely depends on its communication capabilities. Every good ideas from the manager must be properly communicated to the staff for the needed result to be achieved and is considered as one of the necessary traits of a successful managers. Communication systems and mediums have continued to evolve over the years from one stage to another. The evolution also impacts public and private organisations. Currently, most organisation have been putting effort to ensure Electronic Administration (E-administration). The proper communication mechanism is very essential for efficient administration. On a general note, public administration is a function of communication which in the absence of it will be impossible to operate. No communication, no administration and no organisation. We can as well say that the success of every organisation is tied to effective communication.

E-administration focuses on the application of information technology or electronic devices to carry out key activities of governance. However, like any transformative endeavour, the integration of e-administration into the public administration system brings with it a range of both positive and negative consequences. While Nigeria has made commendable strides in harnessing digital technologies for governance, the journey is not devoid of obstacles and dilemmas. The effective use of e-governance in Nigeria presents exciting opportunities for modernization, cost reduction, and citizen empowerment. At the same time, it presents potential challenges, including digital divides, data security concerns, and the need for capacity building (Aderonmu, Owolabi, & Iyiola, 2019).

Government is shrouded with the primary responsibility of delivering public services that satisfy the needs of the masses and also encourage them to pay taxes and other levies. The inefficiency and ineffective service delivery witnessed in the Nigerian civil service could be due to poor application of information and technology tools and e-administration in managing daily affairs of the state. The maladministration and poor service delivery could have been minimized through automation of managerial tasks using e-administration. It is disheartening that the Nigerian civil service is yet to fully embrace the current trend of modern ICT tools and communication gadget for effective and efficient administration of government business. This may be as a result of strict adherence to traditional means of administration which is strictly limited to the use of pen, paper, and storage of bogus files in cabinets. Abah and Nwokwu (2019) further observed that since the conception of the idea of e-governance in Nigeria particularly in 2001, both the current and previous governments have not shown strong political will and determination to ensure that the government succeeds in its Information and Communication Technology goal. Thus, this study is poised at appraising communication and E-administration in the Nigerian civil service and is situated in modernization theory.

Modernization theory

This paper adopts modernization theory. The leading exponents of modernization theory are W.W. Rostow and Roxborough. Modernization theory is a description and explanation of the processes of transformation from traditional or underdeveloped societies to modern societies. Modernization theory is used to explain the process of modernization within societies. Modernization refers to a model of a progressive transition from a 'pre-modern' or 'traditional' to a 'modern' society. The theory looks at the internal factors of a country while assuming that, with assistance, "traditional" countries can be brought to development in the same manner more developed countries have. Modernization theory attempts to identify the social variables that contribute to the social advancement and development of societies and seeks to explain the process of social evolution. Modernization theory is subject to criticism originating among socialist and free-market ideologies, world-systems theorists, globalization theorists, and dependency theorists among others. Modernization theory not only stresses the process of change but also explores the responses to that change. It also looks at internal dynamics while referring to social and cultural structures and the adaptation of new technologies. Modernization theory maintains that traditional societies will develop as they adopt more modern practices. Proponents of modernization theory claim that modern states are wealthier and more powerful and that their citizens are freer to enjoy a higher standard of living.

Modernization theorists also posit that modernization of the economy is required for wealth creation and poverty will then reduce as benefits trickle down through society. This theory is appropriate because it truly illustrates the basic causes of underdevelopment and poverty and also taking into consideration that it is a description or explanations of the processes of transformation from traditional or underdeveloped societies to modern societies. It calls for a model of a progressive transition from a 'pre-modern' or 'traditional' to a 'modern' society which per se "e-administration is part and parcel of that transformation in which government business is being transform from traditional methods of administration that involve strict adherence to pen and paper

work, and storing large bogus of files in the file cabinet. Applying this concept to this work, modernization theory best explains this paper since it recognizes the need to bridge the gap between macro-policies and micro-realities, placing particular emphasis on the macro-level activities normally the state government's responsibility. It recognizes that e-administration will be more effective when it is demand-led" and incorporated into plans for improving the effectiveness and efficiency of government businesses.

Communication

The word "communication" is defined from the Latin word "communis" meaning common. Communication therefore is the process of sharing ideas, facts, opinions, information and understanding. It is the first transfer or transmission of some information and understanding from one person to another (Kazmier, 1977 cited in Mamoria & Gankar 2010). It is the deliberate or not deliberate transfer of information, ideas, and facts from one person or group to another. The information so passed must be understood. According to Weihrich, Cannice & Koontz (2008), communication is the transfer of information from a sender to a receiver with information being understood by the receiver. It is the process of passing information be it verbal or non-verbal means from one person or group to another person or group. Also as opined by Allen, 1958 cited in Sharma and Sadana (2008), communication is the sum of all the things one person does when he wants to create understanding. It could be presented verbally or non-verbally eliciting a response. Simply put, it involves sending and receiving information. In an office, communication is a major tool of operation. Communication is highly involved at all stages of performing the functions of a manager like planning, organizing, coordinating, controlling, reporting, and budgeting. Communication is central to the entire process of administration.

Importance of communication in an organisation

The importance of communication cannot be wish away in any organisation including the Nigerian civil service. Thus, the importance of communication is highlighted below:

- It helps in controlling and shaping the behaviours of members of staff.
- Effective communication easily binds members of staff together.
- It helps in the social interactions among staff
- It helps in quick decision-making
- It fosters motivation
- It gives employee an idea of what is expected from them
- Organisational grievances are easily communicated and handled through effective communication.
- It curtails/discourages the spread of unfounded information, rumours, gossip in an organisation.
- It prepares staff for a change in the organisation.

Generally, there are three major ways of communication in an office, they are formal communication, informal communication, and lateral communication. To communicate effectively with internal and external publics, an organisation can disseminate information through letters, minutes of meetings, reports, memoranda, briefs, handing-over notes, communiqué and circulars, notices, and press releases. Other means of

communication may include phone calls, emails, bulletins, paid advertorials/public service announcements.

Service delivery

The focus and concern of every organisation (private or public) is to render efficient and effective service delivery in line with its core mandate. The growth of any organisation directly depends on the quality of service such organisation delivers (Atairet, 2022). According to El-Rufai (2006), service delivery is the degree to an organisation and/or employee performance, output, and productivity in the discharge of their responsibility within the available time, money and other resources towards the achievement of overall goals of the organisation. It is the efficient and effective mobilization of human and material resources to achieve organisational goals. In the public setting, the delivery of public services to the general public is a function of the distribution of duties and responsibilities to various bureaucratic organisations. The degree to which an organisation or employees perform its duties and functions towards achieving set goals determines the spate of service delivery – whether it is efficient or inefficient, economical or not economical, productive or not productive (Ezekwesili 2010 cited in Atairet, 2022). The effect of public service must be positively felt by the public who are the beneficiaries. Public administration is accountable to the public, which means that the administration has to be accountable for the exercise of the authority which it possesses (Mark & Atairet, 2022). For the people to be satisfied, the service must reflect courtesy, fairness, timely, equity, relevance, accountability, effectiveness and efficient (Atairet, 2022).

Civil service

The civil service refers to the body of men and women, employed in a civil capacity and non-political or non-military career basis, by the federal, state, or local government primarily to render advice and faithfully give effect to government decisions (Atairet & Ndaeyo, 2022). Also as stated by Atairet (2022), the civil service are well organized body of permanent paid officials of government ministries that are solely responsible for implementation of government policies/programmes as prescribe by the constitution. Every government activity revolved round the civil service often regarded as the engine room of government business. Its functions include; policy implementation, policy formulation, delegated legislation and administrative adjudication. The government depends on the civil service for implementation of its policies and programmes. Policy implementation encompasses those actions directed at achieving objectives outlined in policy decisions (Atairet, 2020). Decisions of government to a greater extent cannot be carried out without the civil service who are vast in ensuring smooth operation/implementation of government policies. The civil servants are mostly custodian of government data and information and they are expected to act without fear or favour as they discharge their statutory functions (Atairet, 2022). The civil service is known for the following features - permanency, political neutrality, merit system, impartiality, anonymity, and hierarchy.

E-administration

Electronic Administration (E-Administration) is defined as a subset of e-government which handles governmental tasks not limited to internal administration within government instead of external users such as citizens and businesses. E-administration

can also be seen as the application of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to support and improve office administrative tasks for effective performance and service delivery. E-Administration has to do with the adoption of electronic document management systems, the use of automated workflow processes, and the application of digital tools for inter-agency communication. The adoption of Integrated Personnel and Payroll Information System (IPPIS) in the management of civil service administration in various federal government agencies nationwide is an example of E-Administration. E-Governance and E-Administration seem to be interrelated. The former primarily focuses on enhancing interactions between the government and citizens, while the latter is concerned with making the government's internal operations more efficient and effective. These concepts often overlap and reinforce each other, collectively contributing to the overall transformation of governance (Medupe, & Ajuwon 2020). The main objective of E-administration is to introduce total transparency and accountability leading to better e-governance within any organisation.

From a wider perspective, E-Administration involves the application of technology in the internal administrative functions of the government in their various departments and agencies. According to Olorunsogo and Obamiro, (2016), it involves the digitization and automation of administrative processes, such as record-keeping, data management, communication, and workflow management within government organisations. E-Administration aims to streamline internal operations, minimize bureaucracy, and improve the efficiency and productivity of government agencies. E-Administration has as its primary objective of transforming traditional, paper-based administrative processes into digital systems, allowing government employees to perform their tasks more effectively and efficiently with the help of computer and computer network. It involves the use of technology and computer software such as database management software, Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) systems, document management systems, collaboration tools, and electronic communication channels for effective administration of government business.

Furthermore, Oluwagbemi, Uzoka and Adeoye, (2017) posit that e-governance and e-administration are essential in the modern era, as they promote transparency, accountability, and accessibility in government operations. They also empower citizens by providing easy access to information and services while enabling governments to respond more effectively to the needs of their constituents. The concept of E-administration is to drive innovation, improve decision-making, and foster greater citizen engagement in the public sector, ultimately shaping the future of governance and public administration worldwide. E-administration plays a crucial role in modernizing, shaping, and improving public administration in Nigeria. It enables the governments to live up to their responsibility by providing better public services, improved decisions making based on data analysis, foster transparency and accountability, and streamline internal operations. Through the use of technology, governments can empower citizens, optimize resource utilization, and create more effective and responsive governance systems.

Objectives of E-administration

The smooth running of any organisation is broadly the function of the excellent administration of such a group (Atairet & Ibanga, 2021). With this in mind, every organisation considers administration very important. Accordingly, E-administration is

set to achieve the following objectives as opined by Maduabum (2008), some of the objectives of e-administration include the following:

To ensure transparency in the workings of government;

- To ensure greater efficiency, objectivity, accountability, and speed in providing services and information to the public;
- To provide qualitative and cost-effective services;
- To provide a single window for all government services;
- To evolve responsive administration;
- To provide a friendly, speedier, and efficient interface; and
- To eliminate the middlemen.

The major administrative and democratic improvements offered by e-administration

In the Nigerian democratic setting, the civil service plays very important role in the consolidation of democracy, this is why the civil service is considered very important, and as such E-administration is very necessary for its smooth operation. According to Dyah, (2013), E-administration offers major administrative and democratic improvements, which include the following:

Administrative improvements:

- a) **Efficiency and productivity:** E-governance and e-administration streamline administrative processes, reduce paperwork, and automate tasks, leading to enhanced efficiency and productivity within government organisations. This allows government employees to focus on higher-value activities, resulting in better service delivery.
- b) **Cost savings:** By digitizing processes and reducing manual work, e-administration can lead to cost savings for government organisations. It eliminates the need for physical infrastructure, decreases the use of paper, and optimizes resource utilization.
- c) **Data-driven decision-making:** E-administration provides access to real-time data and analytics, enabling government organisations to make informed, data-driven decisions. This leads to more effective policy formulation, programme evaluation, and resource allocation.
- d) **Streamlined workflows:** E-administration establish streamlined workflows and digital systems that reduce delays and improve overall organisational effectiveness. Tasks, approvals, and communication can be managed electronically, enhancing collaboration and coordination.
- e) **Citizen participation:** E-administration encourages citizen participation in decision-making processes. Online platforms provide opportunities for engagement, consultation, and feedback, enabling citizens to have a greater say in policymaking, planning, and governance.
- f) **Enhanced public service delivery:** E-administration improve public service delivery by providing citizens with convenient access to government services through digital platforms. This reduces bureaucratic hurdles, waiting times, and physical visits, leading to faster and more efficient service provision. Overall, e-administration empowers citizens, improve government transparency, enhance service delivery, and foster democratic participation. By leveraging technology in administrative and governance processes, these advancements contribute to a more efficient,

accountable, and inclusive public administration system. In public administration, various tasks are performed through formal communication in writing and meetings, conferences and interviews (Manjo, 2020). E-administration makes government operations to be more efficient, and responsive to citizen input and needs (Manjo, 2022). E-Administration has impacted on the mode of communication in the Nigerian civil service, though the civil service in Nigeria has not been fully automated.

Benefits of E-administration

- 1) ***Reduced cost of administration:*** E-administration and its application especially in the Civil Service have significantly led to reduction in the cost of handling information. Information is shared at a faster rate with a high level of accuracy and at a reduced cost. According to Ndou (2004), if developing countries appropriately apply e-government initiatives, it will reduce the number of inefficiencies in processes by allowing file and data sharing across government departments, thereby contributing to the elimination of mistakes from manual procedures and reducing the required time for transactions. It is quite unfortunate that most administrative tasks in various government establishments are still reliant on manual methods of information processing which involved high finance.
- 2) ***Improved, fast, and accurate service delivery:*** Service delivery in the Nigerian Civil Service is still traditionally based which is time-consuming because of the bureaucratic nature. The application of E-administration has helped to reduce time consumption and red-tapism, thus resulting in fast and accurate service delivery. The National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) which is a public sector organisation in Nigeria likewise Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB), Abuja Geographical Information System (AGIS), and others have made service delivery to the citizens more convenient, faster, and accurate through the digitalization of their operations and services. The digitalization of these agencies has transformed the landscape of operations. This innovation which involved the application of ICT by these agencies can only be appreciated when compared with the former system of operations of using pen and paper.
- 3) ***Creates access to transparency and accountability:*** The advent of E-administration in the civil service has ensured greater accountability and transparency in the daily administration of government businesses. Information of government are made accessible to the public, thus enhancing transparency and accountability. ICT reform which is presently being experienced through e-government initiatives in Nigeria's public administration has created opportunity for public servants and citizens to have access to official information and transactions that were previously classified.
- 4) ***Participatory governance:*** The introduction of ICT in administration has led to greater citizens' participation in government initiatives and programmes. With the adoption of ICT in administration, citizens are allowed to contribute and exchange ideas and suggestions through electronic forums and websites of various government agencies. This invariably enables the Federal Civil Service to harvest more data from operational systems through an increment in the quality of feedback. It is therefore, obvious that government-to-citizens type of relationships enabled by ICT applications, which before now created suspicion are now reduced as more

information is made available through different kinds of online communication between the Federal Civil Service and her service recipients.

- 5) **Enhances networking and inter-governmental relations:** ICTs provide and enhance networking of relationships among governments, customers, businesses, employees and other organisations. The successful use and diffusion of ICTs in the public sector involves a collective, multi-disciplinary and dynamic learning process. This is the case of such Nigerian public agencies like NYSC, JAMB, AGIS, NOUN, WAEC, and NECO that have fully embraced e-initiatives in the delivery of public services. According to Ndou (2004), the very nature and function of e-governments requires network approach to put together skills, technologies, information and knowledge that span the boundaries of different governmental agencies. The application of e-government therefore, enhances the practice of Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP), which is an integrated business system that ties all the various functions of an enterprise like finance, and human resource management into a cohesive system on a common database. In the views of Wescot et al (cited in Nweke, 2007b, p.168), ERP systems may be integrated with the Internet and workflow. ERP presents opportunities to the civil service in the areas of financial management, human resources management, records management, and material management. The establishment of integrated online network in the civil service therefore, enhances data sharing that facilitates feedback.
- 6) **Boosts competition:** The digitalization of operations and services in the public sector in Nigeria means that the public sector is in healthy competition with the private sector in delivering qualitative and productive services to the citizens. ICT application in the Federal Civil Service therefore, boosts competitive and responsive service delivery in the country. This development is heart-warming and commendable especially when one recalls that the private sector was on top in the use of ICTs in the country before the digitalization of operations and services in the public sector. According to Nweke (2007b:168-169), the Automated Custom Data, Electronic Immigration Passport/Visa Application, Nipost Post Cash, and other similar initiatives are examples of e-government potentials in reforming public administration for increased productivity and competitiveness.
- 7) **Responsive service delivery:** E-administration usage in the civil service provides the structure of opportunities mediating between the citizens and the service using digital information and communication technologies by the government and the citizens. It, therefore, implies that ICT application in the Federal Civil Service brings about citizens' responsiveness and effective service delivery. E-administration also helps to stimulate an exchange of information in which citizens and government relate interactively thereby enhancing productive and responsive service delivery. This also helps to bridge the gap between the citizens and the government.

Challenges of e-administration in Nigeria

E-administration despite its enormous benefits, comes with several challenges that need to be addressed to ensure its successful implementation, especially in the Nigerian Civil Service (Obodo & Anigbata, 2018). Some of the key challenges according to Aderonmu, *et al* (2019), Manjo (2022) include:

- 1) **Digital divide:** Access to technology and the Internet is not universal. Disparities in digital access and literacy can result in marginalized populations being left behind in

- e-administration initiatives. Most offices are still operating without computers and documents are kept on papers which is very unproductive in this dispensation.
- 2) **Cybersecurity:** Ensuring the security of digital systems and data is a paramount concern. Government systems are attractive targets for cyber attacks, and breaches can lead to sensitive information leaks, financial losses, and disruptions in services. Internet fraud (commonly known as Yahoo-yahoo in Nigeria) has been a problem. Civil servants most times are afraid to go “E” because of fear of hackers.
 - 3) **Privacy concerns:** E-administration often involves collecting and storing personal data. Protecting citizens' privacy while providing efficient services is a significant challenge, especially in the context of data breaches and misuse.
 - 4) **Resistance to change:** Government employees and citizens may be resistant to change, particularly when transitioning from traditional paper-based processes to digital systems. Overcoming resistance and ensuring user acceptance is a challenge.
 - 5) **Infrastructure and connectivity:** In many regions, inadequate ICT infrastructure and poor internet connectivity hinder the effective deployment of e-administration. This can be a significant barrier in rural or remote areas.
 - 6) **Technical expertise:** Government agencies may lack the necessary technical skills and expertise to develop and maintain e-administration systems. Recruiting and retaining qualified IT professionals can be challenging.
 - 7) **Funding and sustainability:** Developing and maintaining internet infrastructures and services require substantial financial resources. Governments must secure funding and ensure the sustainability of these initiatives.
 - 8) **Theft and vandalization of digital equipment:** The challenges of theft and vandalization of governmental infrastructure is evident in most part of the country. Digital equipment is easily damage, especially in any part that has crises. Communication masks are always the target.
 - 9) **Epileptic power supply:** The issue of power supply has affected every part and system in Nigeria. E-administration cannot be fully operational without regular power supply.
 - 10) **Low level of digital literacy:** Most civil servants are not digitally literate and this is a great challenge to the implementation of E-administration in Nigerian civil service. Lack of basic digital skill is a major threat to full implementation of E-administration.

Conclusion/recommendations

E-administration has obviously present enormous opportunities to the Nigerian public sector especially the civil service. This has apparently enhances effective and efficient service delivery in the Nigerian public service. The introduction of ICT into the Nigerian civil service has dramatically transformed the landscape of information processing, information storage, retrieving, securing and dissemination of salient government information. Furthermore, it is concluded that the emergence of ICTs in the civil service has guaranteed a responsible civil service which enhances equity, transparency, accountability, responsibility, effectiveness and efficiency especially in the service delivery to the public. It has become a necessity for all countries aiming at improving and transforming their public service to people-oriented civil service.

However, the introduction of E-administration in some offices in the Nigerian civil service is not without challenges. The major challenges of e-administration implementation in the Federal Civil Service is inadequate ICT infrastructure; lack of

political will by the government of the day; low ICT skills personnel, problems of adapting to change; poor power supply; high costs of ICT facilities, and affordability. These and many more have crippled the opportunities offered by ICT for greater efficiency and effectiveness of the Nigerian civil service. It thus behooves on the government to take measures to tackle the challenges associated with ICT application in the civil service for effective service delivery to the people.

Accordingly, considering the benefits of E-administration; the government should ensure that adequate technological infrastructure is provided and civil servants should be trained to adapt to the new normal. The government should be deliberate in ensuring that E-administration affected in all governmental offices is effective and efficient for vital transparent, ethical, and inclusive Nigerian civil service.

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