

Research Article

The Nigerian Civil Servants and Annual Functions: A Critical Analysis of Annual Performance Evaluation Report (APER)

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Abstract

Civil servants are employees of government that provides services or goods to the public in whatever capacity on behalf of government. Nigerian Civil servants attach too much value to the Annual Performance Evaluation (APER) which done annually. This research work was designed to critically analyse the Nigerian Civil Service Rules Annual Functions in line with the Annual Performance Evaluation Reports (APER). The main objective of the study is to examine the importance of the Annual Performance Evaluation Report to the Nigerian Civil Servants. Relevant data for this research work were collected from secondary sources. A descriptive method was used for this study. The research therefore concluded and recommended that the Civil Service should maintain the value attached to the Annual Performance Evaluation Report (APER); Annual Performance Evaluation Report (APER) is more effective compared to other ways evaluating performance and should be treated as such in the civil service among other criteria of evaluating performance; APER should remain the basis of any promotion exercise in the civil service; finally, an elaborate APER should be devised with emphasis on competencies and specialisations.

Keywords

Civil Service, APER, Annual Function

1. Introduction

The civil servants, as it is everywhere in the world are employees of government that provides services or goods to the public in whatever capacity on behalf of government. In line of this, they are agents of governmental authorities. In Nigeria for instance there are 812 governments recognised by the 1999 constitution (as amended) consisting of the Federal Government, the 36 state governments and 774 local governments [3]. These governments have more than 2,000 agencies and extra departmental authorities that employed more than three million workers. These workers provide ser-

vices that cut across all professional callings. Due to this varied callings and services, the workers offering such services have been named variously as public servants, civil servants, government workers as the case may be. But of significance to us, are the duties they perform and what impact or difference it makes. Whatever, they do reflect the image of the government they work for and the people they provide services or goods to [22].

However, the civil service is saddled with some certain responsibilities which could be divided into two. They are

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routine and annual. The routine functions has to do with ensuring smooth running of the day to activities of the administration, while the annual functions includes; Annual Budgets; Annual Performance Evaluation Report (APER); and Annual Reports (progress report) [16].

Therefore, the civil service must deliver its service efficiently. The civil service is a complex organization of functions, in which civil servants and public servants follow laid down processes and procedures in their day to day activities to translate government policies into goods and services for public consumption [15]. Civil servants are employed workers in their civil capacities. This meaning is not different from those working in the Nigerian civil services. However, there is a distinction between the meaning of civil service and public service in Nigeria. This also applies to the terms civil servant and public servant. Those whose appointment, discipline, promotion transfer, retirement etc, are under the various civil service commissions of the federal government or the states are the core civil servants. They are subject to the civil service rules and regulations including the financial instructions among others. Those working in other governmental agencies and the arm forces, Para-military agencies and other special departments whose appointment, promotion, discipline among others are based on delegated authorities and powers are not subject to the various civil services rules and scheme of service. Therefore, they fall under the purview of public servants. The civil servants and the public servants are all workers of the 812 governments recognised by the constitution in their various manifestations and functions [1].

Arising from the various professional callings in the service and the need to ensure that there is good service delivery and that those who take higher responsibilities are the best, the Annual Performance Evaluation Report was instituted long ago under various civil service rules as an annual function of the civil servants. Apart from the need to provide necessary wherewithal and other facilities, especially assessing the performance, and promotability of a civil servant, have necessitated the need for APER in the world over.

2. Research Questions

The following questions will guide this paper;

- What is the value attached to Annual Performance Evaluation Report (APER)?
- How important is Annual Performance Evaluation Report (APER) is to the promotion of the Civil Servants.
- How effective is Annual Performance Evaluation Report (APER) compare to ways of appraising Civil Servant Performance?

3. Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this paper is to examine the im-

portance of the Annual Performance Evaluation Report on the Nigerian Civil Servants.

The specific objectives are;

- To examine the value attached to Annual Performance Evaluation Report (APER)?
- To determine the extent to which Annual Performance Evaluation Report (APER) is important to the promotion of the Civil Servants.
- To determine how effective is Annual Performance Evaluation Report (APER) compare to ways of appraising Civil Servant Performance.

4. Methodology

The study will be based on extensive literature review using secondary data; articles, journals, books, Government publications, analysis of the APER forms, and outcomes of unstructured interview conducted with officials of Federal civil service Commission, which is the agency saddled with the responsibility of appraising Federal civil servants in Nigeria. There is no definite theory to the literature review, rather it is used as an aid to gather and analyze data for conceptual framework in answer to the research questions. Furthermore, some of the information will be based on personal work experience, having been in the public sector for the past five years presents participant observation based on first- hands experience.

5. Literature Review

5.1. Nigerian Civil Service

The Civil service is an organ created to ensure that policies and programs of any government at any particular time are carried out. The Civil service as part of Government never dies because of its perpetual nature and the changing nature of constitutionally elected government, it has to be endowed with specific peculiarities or leaning's of that government. Further characteristics of the civil service are that [18]:

- It has to be non - partisan to enable it serve any government of the day.
- It has to be made u of experienced men and women with the technical and professional know- how to enable it implement government policies.
- It has to be orderly and also ensure that orderly administration of the country is continuous.
- The Civil Service is indispensable since it continues the traditional role of keeping the functions of government running no matter what changes occurs in the administration of the country.
- It operates under rules which guide its conduct. The meaning of the concept of Public or Civil Service as established by the Nigerian Constitution is provided for in sections 171, 172, 206, 208 and 318 and in section 10 of Third

Schedule of the 1999 Constitution, as amended.

f) The Civil Service is an entity but operates in hives of activities, divided between Ministers and Departments. Each of the Department has it set functions and goals.

5.2. The Annual Performance Evaluation Reports (APER) Form

The APER form applies to all categories of service and civil servants; hence there is no difference between technical and administrative staff. Nevertheless, there are some variations between the senior cadre and the junior cadre. The yearly APER is divided into five sections. The first part contains employee's personal record and leave records; part two contains tasks and targets set, job description, key achievements, training/course attended in the year under review and job performance; in this part the employee fills his tasks and targets based on his job description for the year to measure whether he has performed to expectation [8]. The third part evaluates character traits, assessment of performance by superior, work ethics, leadership qualities, training needs and teamwork; the fourth parts specifies next year's tasks and targets, comments by the employee on the assessment, declaration/signature by the employee and the reporting officer; the last part is the counter signing officer's report, who is normally the immediate superior of the reporting officer. The countersigning officer makes the process more transparent and creates room for feedback mechanism and monitoring which can control supervisors and reviewers from being subjective to some extent.

In addition, The APER form is well structured and comprehensive. It captures all the relevant aspects of what is to be measured in appraisal process in terms of job descriptions and character traits; hence it is more of a developmental approach format. Furthermore, the form makes it possible for employees to specify their future training needs which will further boost their careers and make them more efficient thereby also reducing the tasked placed on the human resource department of determining the kind of training an employee needs. Declaration section is also a sign of objectivity because an employee can express his/her opinion about the appraisal process and one is not liable to sign the form if he/she feels the process is subjective. In response to questions on the comprehensiveness of the APER form, interviewees commended the existing format and stated that the problem does not lay with the design of the form but rather on the evaluation process and how the appraisal is conducted. However, the use of APER forms, marks are so generously awarded to the extent that in a given group of employees to be assessed no one scores less than ninety five percent with some exception scoring up to hundred percent which is impractical and impossible in objective appraisal, yet no evidence of high performance or excellence exist in the Nigeria's public sector [11].

In conclusion, the present appraisal system should be abandoned due to its inefficiency and the old confidential

reporting system re-introduced, subsequently the APER form should be redesigned to conform with the confidential reporting system [7]. On the other hand, Government should commission consultants walking with in-house committee to redesign a standardized assessment format and develop new performance management system [12].

5.3. The Civil Servant and Annual Performance Evaluation Report

It is assumed that the relevance, promotion, training of the civil servant entirely depends on the efficient and effective performance of the civil service and the civil servant himself. Therefore, the performance of the civil servant is measured on the basis of his work, conduct at the work place and his conformity with the rules and regulations of the service as well as public expectations. Though, there are ways in which government periodically assesses its performance and public expectations on what it is doing or what it has done or what it will be doing in future, these do not necessarily reflect the civil servant performance or his conduct, but reflect the image of the civil service and to the civil servant.

The need for the evaluation of the civil servant performance was indeed necessary [2, 21]. Right from colonial era, the APER was evolved as a way of promoting discipline and good conduct in the service, assessing training needs, and standing as a reward instrument- promotion. The promotion component is the most vital aspect of evaluation in Nigeria right from the onset, despite the fact that other issues in the evaluation were ancillary. In spite of the series of reviews of the work procedures, or general orders, or civil service handout before independence or civil service rules after independence and now public service rules, the essence of the APER was for the sake of promotion and must be rendered on all officers by the end of every calendar year. Section 3 of the Nigerian Public Service Rule is emphatic on this matter and states in rule No 06301: "The object of Annual Performance Evaluation Reports is to provide a full record of each officer's work, conduct and his suitability for promotion may be judged by the Federal Civil Service Commission [5]. In order that the commission may be in a position to weigh, in connection with a particular vacancy, the merits of officers, it is important that it should know precisely what work the officer has been engaged upon and the judgement form on that work. It is not less important that the Federal Civil Service Commission should receive an indication of each officer's suitability for appointment to a senior grade in which he would have to perform administrative or supervisory duties; it may be the officer's work in the appointment he holds gives the fullest satisfaction, but he is unsuitable for more responsible duties, and the Federal Civil Service Commission particularly desires to have a record or expression of opinion as to each officer's suitability for promotion when, by his seniority, he may be regarded as eligible to be considered for such advancement." PSR (2000) Section 06304 adds

the necessity of supplying the fullest information in replying to questions in the APER form so that the information could be used for the sake of promotion without reference to anybody or the officer's file or to any other documents [19]. There is also in the form a provision that allows a civil servant who had filled the APER to vet or endorse or disagree with the comment of his superior or supervising officer. This, in the spirit of the provision is to allow fairness and objection in the annual promotion exercises being carried out by the Federal Civil Service Commission PSR (2000) [10]. The commission in exercising its functions and powers must also take cognisance of the comment of the officer under assessment. It is on the premise that no other yardstick could be used by as an instrument of evaluation in the promotion of the civil servant. And that the information requested in the APER is the only legal instrument accepted as at now in our statutes for the promotion of civil servant to the next grade level. The fact is that the APER form has provided for the request of information about the training needs of the worker, his work schedules and other responsibilities, it was not meant to remedy his deficiency. It was purely for promotion. The civil service had used the information supplied by the civil servants for purposes of training and introducing new reforms in the servants for the working place to promote efficiency and better service delivery.

5.4. The Role of Annual Performance Evaluation Report

The role of APER in the past was very explicit. The provision for APER is only for the sake of promotion to senior grade level for a civil servant whose conduct, performance and discipline have adjudged suitable and on merit for elevation to the next higher level in his career. This annual evaluation is done in all cadres of work in the service. The questions in the APER are specifically coined to elicit information to allow the Federal Civil Service Commission to have the ability of forming an opinion on a worker about his suitability or otherwise in order to make a judgement as to his promotion. This, the commission has in the past, especially in the 1960's, 1970's and early 1980's exercised it creditably well [20]. Even though, the APER form consists of many general questions that cover all cadres of civil servants, it was used purely for the promotion exercise. No other sources of information were relied upon in making such promotions. The judgements made on workers were partly their responses to the APER questions and partly the comment of their supervisors. The information was also used to promote training, planning, succession, creating new schedules, posting, deployment and redeployment of workers. Succession plans, manpower planning and development have been done in the past through information obtained in the annual evaluation exercise. It has also serve as a veritable tools for service delivery improvement as well as improving the capacity of the civil servant to cope with the challenges

of providing for the welfare of the people. Today, the story of APER appears to be different due to a number of reasons. The number of workers today is legion. The civil service structure is skewed at the top, leaving few vacancies for competition during promotion. There also corruption, political interference by political office holders, neglect of the provision of laws and the public service rules and nepotism and other consideration such as the federal character principle enshrined the 1999 constitution's fundamental principles of the state policy. For these reasons, the APER plays a secondary role in the promotion of the civil servant. The APER form is still filled annually by civil servants as part of the obligatory rituals prescribed by the public service rule. Of concern mostly for civil servants that are not due for promotion to the next grade level, is ensure the notional promotion, which is in monetary form [5]. Without filling the APER form, a civil servant is capable of losing the annual notional promotion. This by implication will serve as a kind of demotion. Since it is done once annually, no civil servant would like to be excluded from the exercise. The revised public service rule has today introduced other consideration in the promotion of the civil servants than the information obtained in the APER form. For instance Rule 02702 of the public service rule states that promotion shall be strictly on the basis of merit from among eligible candidates. And that in assessing the candidates there should be several considerations [9]. These include a clear distinction be made between the records of performance of the officers, their efficiency at the present grade level as well as their potential for promotion. The rest are seniority, conduct, availability of vacancies, acquired necessary and relevant skills as required by the cadres and satisfactory interview performance before an appropriate committee for that purpose PSR (2000) [8]. Besides, these criteria put forward in the Public service rule, aptitude tests have been introduced along side with professional qualifications and other academic qualifications. These have been introduced through different circulars over the years. For example, in some ministries, no one can become a director without a degree of the doctor of philosophy whatever may be his experience, publications and inventions in his area of calling. This provision is strictly applied in the Ministry of Science and Technology. In some ministries, one needs to have higher degrees to qualify for promotion such as Master of Public Administration, Masters of Business Administration or any higher degree irrespective of the field of work of the officer concerned.

One disturbing aspect in the APER criteria for promotion with these rules is that there are no clear criteria or guidelines that allow the assessors to grade those they are assessing [13]. For instance what constitute good conduct and performance? Which qualifications are accepted by the government as professionals? There are occasions where questions for interviews and aptitude tests are set by those who are not qualified to set them and who are not also from the professional calling- civil engineers preparing tests or exam-

inations for electrical or mechanical engineers- and so is the practice today. Therefore, today, there is lack of objectivity in the evaluation of the civil servant performance for the purpose of promotion as the APER form is no longer the instrument of promotion evaluation. Discrimination has also been introduced on the basis of professional and academic qualification, whereas examinations set without standards now play vital role in promotion. The role of APER with this development today has diminished. The issues of which professional qualifications will be considered for promotion have left many unanswered questions? And the introduction of academic papers- higher degrees are illegal because they are not known in law. Today many ministries and departments have introduced conflicting guidelines which defer substantially from the provision of the Civil Service Rules and without a single method accepted by the government or a minimum standard in the grade and scoring of candidates. These, therefore make APER irrelevant in the promotion of the civil servant. With these trends, the future looks bleak for the civil servants in terms of promotion using APER model. The role of APER will continue to be relegated to the background with all the legal and illegal innovations. The Civil Service Rule provides that APER shall be the basis of any assessment for the purpose of promotion, yet the same document introduces other criteria that must be considered for the exercise. These appear conflicting, but legitimate. With this uncontrolled development, every ministry, department, extra- ministerial department forging ahead with new rules for promotion, assessment, relegating the civil service rule and rationality, then the APER and the civil servant may not be relevant in the promotion exercise. Ancillary services, such as, training assessment needs, productivity, succession plans, human resource needs and organisational diagnosis may no longer be possible through the use of APER.

5.5. Issues and Challenges

Based on the analysis of available literature on public presentation assessment and the assessment system in Nigeria's civil service, and consequence of interview conducted with functionaries of the Civil Service Commission, one can now state that the system is unsatisfactory nevertheless the inefficiency of the procedure overrides its effectively. Some of the challenges presently confronting the assessment system include embedded organisational civilization, Lack of participatory leading, ill-defined occupation description, unequal preparation, discontinuous assessment procedure, deficiency of committedness to employee development, and subjectiveness in appraisal.

Organizational civilization has a deep impact on employee's public presentation which can be either positive or negative depending on the norms and values of the organisation [17]. Harmonizing to interviewees the assessment procedure has non been effectual because employees tend to follow the organisational civilization hence at that place has been no

room for betterment and the system besides fails to acknowledge the importance of the assessment procedure. Furthermore, it has been reference in the literature reappraisal that one major job that leads to ineffectiveness of the assessment procedure is its deficiency of inclusion in the organisational civilization and pattern [14].

Furthermore, if there is no participatory work force attitude in the assessment whereby the procedure is implemented from the top to the underside so it tends to be unsuccessful [14]. In the civil service, the procedure was designed and implemented without taking into consideration employees parts. Hence the procedure is chiefly geared non participatory which brings about deficiency of committedness on the portion of the employees and blocks opportunities of invention and creativeness on how to reform the procedure. It further widens the spread between the supervisors and employees, thereby doing it impossible for employees to talk up during the interview procedure due to fear of negative reverberations.

In add-on, deficiency of clear and defined occupation description makes the procedure ineffective because public presentation measurings criterions must be established harmonizing to single occupation description which should be tied to organisational ends and aims. Hence if there is no clear occupation description so the inquiry becomes what is really measured? Responses from the interview pointed out that no written occupation description was specified upon their enlisting; instead they are merely expected to make what they are being told by the supervisors. The literature reappraisal reveals that appraisal mistakes occur due to misconstrue ends or deficiency of lucidity of ends and nonsubjective assessment can merely be achieved if there are realistic ends to compare the consequence with [4]. Hence, failure to aline public presentation criterions with occupation description leads to misinterpretations, deficiency of satisfaction, ineffectualness, and confusion in the assessment procedure [23].

Similarly, it has been observed that supervisors are non good equipped on the assessment procedure. The assessment procedure is ineffective in Nigeria 's civil service due to miss of apprehension and unequal preparation. It is of import for supervisors to get accomplishments on how to measure present and past public presentation and besides how to train employees on future betterments [11, 2]. Without clear apprehension of the procedure, the system tends to be used and hence it is used as a agency of authorization and power instead than for development intents.

Furthermore, if the assessment procedure is conducted for employee betterment so there is demand for a uninterrupted rating procedure. Quite the antonym, the assessment in the civil service is done on a annual footing hence supervisors tend to bury past public presentation thereby measuring appraisee based on recent events, public presentation and character traits. Furthermore, the valutors fail to see the procedure as portion of the occupation duty instead they see it as a annual load. This arises because the assessment procedure is conducted one time a twelvemonth.

Despite this fact, the system besides fails to develop employee's calling [6]. Even though the APER signifier has a proviso for preparation demands, it is simply theoretical instead than practical. Harmonizing to available literature, one of the aims of assessment is for development, adding value to employees. Hence is the system fails to acknowledge and measure employees demands so one admirations why the system was set up in the first topographic point. In several instances, it has been observed that, employees are nominated for developing based on personal relationship with supervisors instead than on good public presentation or demand for preparation. This fails to actuate employees because they believe developing is independent of the procedure, in other words even with the assessment process their demands are non considered.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

This study reveals that the civil servants attach too much value to the Annual Performance Evaluation (APER) which done annually. However, the study reveals that the present APER form is too general to satisfy the needs of evaluating the civil servant performance in view of different areas of specialisation. It also concludes that APER had played an important role in the past in the promotion of the civil servant as it was the only document considered in any promotion exercise. It was only information obtained in the report that forms the basis of promotion. Meanwhile, many other criteria have been introduced over the years which have relegated the APER to the background. Some of them can be found in the Civil Service Rule, while others are not known in any law of the land and yet take prominence over the APER. If the present trends are left unchecked, the civil servant and the APER may never get fair and equitable deal in any promotion exercise. The standard of promotion has already been compromised with many unapproved yardsticks in place.

In order to further evaluate the importance of Annual Performance Evaluation Report on the Nigerian Civil Servants the paper recommends the following:

1. The Civil Service should maintain the value attached to the Annual Performance Evaluation Report (APER).
2. Annual Performance Evaluation Report (APER) is more effective compared to other ways evaluating performance and should be treated as such in the civil service among other criteria of evaluating performance.
3. This study recommends that APER should remain the basis of any promotion exercise. All guidelines, criteria for promotion should be provided for in the civil service rules. No ministry, department, extra- ministerial department should be allowed to introduce any criteria, guidelines whether under delegated powers or not unless with the approval of the Federal Civil Service Commission and gazetted.
4. An elaborate APER should be devised with emphasis on competencies and specialisations. Elaborate quarterly

evaluation should be made where necessary, reflecting tasks, duties, schedules, added responsibilities, special assignments, special commendations and new discoveries or breakthroughs.

Abbreviations

APER	Annual Performance Evaluation Report
PSR	Public Service Review

Author Contributions

Ademeso Tosin Success is the sole author. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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