



LEADING AND COORDINATING REFORM IN THE PUBLIC SERVICE

BY

Dr Tunji OLAOPA

Executive Vice Chairman

Ibadan School of Government & Public Policy (ISGPP)

tolaopa@ibsgpp.com

tolaopa2003@gmail.com

tolaopa2003@yahoo.com

INTRODUCTION

Why is this seminar event significant?

- ❑ Because we are living in a season of change
- ❑ And to get change to really happen is contingent on a number of variables, of which the capability readiness of the civil service is critical
- ❑ So the question has never been whether to reform or not but essentially what direction the reform ought to go and what can make it sustainable

In this intervention therefore, I will try to:

- ❑ Outline the basics of change management that is embedded in the reform process
- ❑ Address issues of why reforms fail, hence the perception that talk about reform is rhetorical
- ❑ Substantively, what it means to lead reforms, i.e. dominant personality attributes of a reformer and competencies demanded of that role

- ❑ The phenomenon of a Lead Agency in comparative global perspective, to interrogate our own BPSR
- ❑ What coordination overall, entails, and what a lead agency should focus on as the hub for coordinating reform programmes
- ❑ Concluding with an outline of the critical success factors to watch out for

■ The Fundamentals of Reform

- ❑ In OD theory, the civil service, like all organisations, pass through a typical life-cycle: birth-adolescence-maturity-institutionalisation-reform cycle
- ❑ Civil service specifically oscillates b/w managerial traditions that fit somewhat into Douglas McGregor's spectrum in 'Theory X' (I am directed) and 'Theory Y' (flavoured by the entrepreneurial and technocratic management concepts)
- ❑ Stagnation usually sets in when an organisation is at the peak of its success (early '70s in Nigeria)

Continued

- ❑ To get into a change or reform curve however, an MDA must address three (3) realities that confront all organisations:
 - First, there is the public service and its base fundamentals rooted in the role of the state redefinition around the public service "core" and "non-core" functions;
 - The second is rethinking of the public service's building blocks or organisation DNA usually made up of goals, metrics, strategy, culture, and operating system;
 - And third, there is the fundamental capability of the organisation, a mix of the individual, team and institutional

Continued

- ❑ Two, before getting into the nitty-gritty of intricate change management that make up the reform process, you have to take critical decisions on the level and scope of institutional change that is required to ignite overall structural transformation.
- ❑ There are five (5) such indicative decisions and associated programmes that should be implemented:

Continued

- a) "Big bang" root and branch structural change;
- b) Gradualist and incremental improvement change rooted in continuous learning and iterated changes;
- c) Cost-induced changes on account of dwindling revenue;
- d) Process change focused on changing how things get done; and
- e) Culture change usually focused on the "human" side of the enterprise e.g. shift from the bureaucratic to an entrepreneurial or technocratic managerial culture.

Continued

- ❑ Whatever reform strategic thrust you choose, it must be grounded on six (6) inviolable reform policy architecture. These reform pillars are:
 - 1) A clear development strategy and roadmap (the change agenda)
 - 2) Long-term institutional reform strategy and programme (NSPSR)
 - 3) A lead agency attending to reform coordination that has access to the highest political leadership (BPSR)
 - 4) Effective alignment and communication between the political, technocratic and administrative leadership (Steering Committee on Reforms and a communication strategy)
 - 5) Full involvement of the MDAs in reform execution (Change Management Unit at MDA level)
 - 6) Effective monitoring, evaluation and reporting framework

■ Why Do Most Reforms Fail?

- ❑ Most reforms fail not because they were not properly conceived though significantly, the nitty-gritty of conceptions impact on success
- ❑ The real issue, the devil indeed resides in implementation details
- ❑ Several reasons have been documented in the literature on why reforms fail in Africa:

Continued

- i. CSRs are based on the wrong premises – on the idea of “affordable” civil services rather than “required civil services” dictated by the logic of a democratic, developmental state;
- ii. CSRs are based on poor diagnosis – that African civil services are over-bloated – a fact that cannot be empirically established for the totality of the African civil service profile. These civil services are poorly structured and concentrated. They have surpluses at the base but substantial shortages at the professional levels. Skilled personnel are also not well distributed in space, as there is a tendency to over-concentration at the centre;
- iii. CSRs constitute a wrong prognosis; they represent the application of a wrong prescription to the problem confronting African countries;

- iv. CSRs have tended to be generally minimally participatory, often excluding the key stakeholders, the civil servants. It was feared that involvement of the stakeholders might slow down the implementation of retrenchment programmes in the civil service;
- v. CSRs have tended to focus on the short rather than the long term, because donors, who have provided the impetus for most reform efforts, must come up with immediate results to appease their domestic constituents;
- vi. CSRs are largely disconnected from other political and economic reforms taking place in the countries.

Continued

- ❑ If you are concerned about the deep issues involved in reforms, then you would look at such issues as which touch on conception-reality gap can be identified in various forms:
 - ❖ Disconnect in designs between underlying system's dysfunctions namely; governance, policy and administrative operations that impact on changes
 - ❖ Equating symptoms with disease to be cured in conception
 - ❖ Faulty diagnosis and prognosis usually due to wrong assumptions and externally-induced preferences:
 - ❖ Cost reduction through rightsizing that erode existing trust and capacities
 - ❖ Use of best practice knowledge without research interrogation

Continued

- ❖ Tendency to reduce system's issues to common sense disregarding the fact that public administration has a strong theoretical underpinnings
- ❖ Inability to ground or derive reform solutions from action research
- ❖ Refusal to learn from past mistakes
- ❖ High turnover rate of reform managers and loss of institutional memory
- ❖ Overemphasis on changes in structures and procedures and a disregard for the most critical and challenging culture change dimension and work attitude

Leading the Reform

- ❑ In most of the reforms that have failed in Nigeria, two dominant factors have been responsible: leadership and lack of ownership and political will
- ❑ Leading reform therefore implies deploying competence to define what the future should look like and to align people with that vision and inspire them to make it happen despite obstacles
- ❑ Leading in the early stages: The early stages is most critical because it is this stage that determines the survival strategy that:

Continued

- ❑ Leading in the early stages: The early stages is most critical because it is this stage that determines the survival strategy that:
 - a) Manages the initial shaky support
 - b) Delivers on short-term results (within 6-10 months, or less to ensure quick buy-in that establishes required support structure that guarantee sustainable progress)
- ❑ The danger is that we must ensure that short time results do not distract attention from the long-term objectives that essentially define the transformation of system overall and the institution itself

■ What makes for efficient reform leadership? ---

- ❑ This is a multidimensional question with many strands:
- ❑ To determine the personality traits that would effectively facilitate and sustain the reform process
- ❑ That may be difficult to sketch out, but ...
- ❑ Reformers are generally known to be tough, logical, idealistic without losing touch with reality, detached without being indifferent, and flexible, and overall, with a seminar and scientific spirit

Continued

- ❑ In essence, leadership in the context of change management is not about being loved and satisfying everybody
- ❑ On the contrary, it is more about being understood and respected enough by those critical to getting the reform job done as efficiently as possible
- ❑ In essence, a smart reform manager would not be afraid to step on toes or ruffle feathers, while not deliberately setting out to offend people

Lead Agency and Requirements for Reform Coordination

- ❑ Reform coordination requires the establishment of an institutional framework, a network of effectiveness, capacities, mechanism and change agents
- ❑ The sense is that of putting in place a management structure that is a departure from the regular bureaucratic structure thus taking reform as a special programme requiring non-regular management approach
- ❑ Such a structure should necessarily include a lead agency that will oversee reform implementation

Continued

- ❑ For lead, it comes to critical mix of about 30% technical competence and 70% political sense
- ❑ You could come to it from point of expertise, with project management skills or simply by virtue of posting or appointment
- ❑ The Agency must be manned by a critical mass of reform-minded personnel
- ❑ With good knowledge of OD principles and best practices and capacity to manage innovations

Continued

- ❑ Core competency involved would include that in change management, project management, M&E, communication skills, policy analysis, research & analytics, etc
- ❑ Staffing is best with a mix of specially selected innovators from within the service and experts outsiders
- ❑ Relatively slim but competent staffing supplemented with specialist outside expert brought in on a non-permanent basis, as the need arise
- ❑ High-end expertise attracted by some dedicated funds to mobilise skills to tackle specific challenge or to facilitate skills transfer

Reform Coordination in Comparative Perspective

- ❑ There is a rich array of models around the globe
- ❑ France with its tradition of a strong state and legalistic public administration practices, has no reform plan, blueprint. or strategy as such
- ❑ Its reforms are generally incremental and gradualist, with no lead agency that has responsibility to coordinate reform activities

- ❑ Same is true of Netherland, where MDAs enjoy considerable managerial autonomy and are not centrally governed
- ❑ In the UK, with a tradition of central governance, reform is largely centrally managed and top-down
- ❑ Malaysia, reform peaked with the establishment of the Malaysia Administrative and Manpower Planning Unit (MAMPU) in 1977. It studies and identifies major problems facing processes and systems and suggests measures to overcome them

- ❑ In Namibia the OPM supervises the public service through the Civil service Department using three directorate structures: HRM, MSD and Efficiency Charter Department
- ❑ In Mozambique there is an Inter-Ministerial Commission for PSR and a Technical Unit that offers operational and methodological assistance to reform implementing agencies, which also have change management units

■ Nigeria Trajectory of Reform Lead Agency Role

- ❑ O&M Unit transferred in 1956 to Establishment Division vide the Gorsuch Reform Commission
- ❑ The Udoji Commission rechristened it as the Public Service Reform Unit (PSRU) in 1974
- ❑ The PRSU mutated into MSD and subsequently, MSO headed by a permanent secretary

- ❑ In 2003, BPSR emerged as engine room for the implementation of the National Reform Strategy developed in 2003
- ❑ Justifications: The need for a clearing house, a one-stop-shop on all FGN reform programmes
- ❑ With a shift from the blueprint-rooted reform to a continuous learning and incremental approach to reform, BPSR institutionalised reform as a day-to-day function, which everyone acknowledged that an ad hoc committee and a task force cannot achieve

- The scope of the agency's operational responsibilities includes the following:
 - Conducting diagnostics, studies and research to identify problems being faced by MDAs, and formulate a change programme that is either a subject of Circular by HCSF backed up by manuals to guide MDAs' implementation for their systems improvement.
 - Clarifying reform objectives of government e.g. the tenure policy for top-level posts etc., and assemble required expertise to design appropriate back up methodologies, instruments and tools as well as schedule of system change initiatives to make success thereto.

Continued

- Supporting MDAs to set up reform implementation structures and competencies to take on their reform activities successfully and sustainably.
- Holding MDAs accountable for attaining agreed performance targets.
- Ensure sustained and efficient funding of reform activities should be admitted into the planning, strategic and expenditure frameworks.
- Ensure proactive public private sectors partnership in the implementation of reforms.

- Develop tracking mechanism to report and celebrate innovations by MDAs in the reforms process, while designs, tested solutions and changes that have worked at a limited domain should be marketed and/or deployed service-wide and to other tier of government through such national council federating platform as the National Council on Establishment.

■ Critical Challenges that BPSR Faced at Inception

- ❑ Absence of common implementation scheduled (for coherence of execution) that creates milestones, timelines and performance indicators against which MDAs are assessed;
- ❑ Absence of baseline survey-based public perception benchmarks against which reform-induced system improvement is measured;
- ❑ Poor programme of service-wide capacity development for reform implementation;

Continued

- ❑ Lack of coordination framework between the work of BPSR and SERVICOM as well as the sector strategy development undertaken by the Budget Office;
- ❑ Inadequate communication of reforms with insufficient emphasis on strategic communication as a component of a change management programme of the reform;
- ❑ Lack of learning platform that could create a community of practice knowledge support for BPSR's research and best practices remit;
- ❑ BPSR's insularity and the need for inclusiveness.

■ Competency Framework for a Reform Lead Agency

□ In *The Nigerian Civil Service of the Future*, my 2014 book, I outlined some critical competences, in three clusters, that could facilitate the function of the BPSR as a reform coordination agency. These are:

- (1) Setting Direction: seeing the big picture, changing and improving and making effective decisions;
- (2) Engaging People: leading and communicating, collaborating and partnering and building capabilities;
- (3) Delivering Results: achieving commercial outcomes, delivering value for money, managing quality service and delivering at pace.

- ❑ These competences would then be backstopped by specialists in critical areas: public sector specialist to articulate the big picture; policy analysts and researchers;
- ❑ HR and performance management specialists; communication expert, ICT expert; change management specialist; M&E and project management experts; economists with strong financial and budgeting expertise; ergonomists and econometricians; change management specialists; etc.

■ Sustaining Reforms: The Critical Success Factors

- Finally, an astute reform manager ought to keep a checklist of those issues and process that constitute critical factors around which reform success can be defined and managed. The following is an outline of tested principles.
 - i. **Vision and Mission Statements:**
 - A clear idea of where you are headed
 - A solid view of the myriad of forces that will influence the journey
 - ii. **Leadership and Team-building**
 - Helps to develop shared vision and unity of purpose
 - Central to building teams, networks and trust

iii. Communication Strategy

- Strong stakeholders mapping and analysis
- To create shift from a fortress-like, come-to-me approach
- With downward, upward and horizontal flexible tools
- With strong tools and capacity for confronting rumour, correcting correcting misinformation, building support and esprit de corps corps
- Exploiting technologies for corrected-ness/no-wrong-doers

iv. Change Management

- Weathering the storm
- Delineating the 'massive' and the 'incremental'
- Converting everyone to become an 'agent of change'

v. Problem-solving Competences

- Tool-kits; not one-model-fit-all
- Continuous Learning
- Needs-based training and competency building
- Invest in problem-solving and decision-making and
- Communication skills-building
- Build data usage culture

vi. Celebrate Achievements

- Recognize small wins
- Not spare under-performance
- Build benchmarks with strong performance indicators

Conclusion

- ❑ To desire reform in one thing, to get it to happen is serious business
- ❑ In striving for reform that will make the difference, is there a choice between comprehensiveness or selectivity in reform implementation
- ❑ You would hardly be able to eat omelette without cracking egg
- ❑ Reform is invariably a learning journey, on a rough road
- ❑ But reform is realizable, if there is critical balance between passion and knowledge and between the conceptions and reality, as well as between the short-term and the long-term

■ Conclusion

- ❑ Always remember that whereas civil service reform is not rocket science, but public administration that defines it has a theoretical foundation
- ❑ It is invariably a thankless job, but that's true with all true legacies, only posterity tells our story
- ❑ Work very hard to secure funding, as reform is not cheap

**THANK YOU FOR
LISTENING**

