Line and Staff: A Critical issue in Administration of Wages and Salary as a factor of motivation

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents an examination of line and staff concepts which are contemporary in management discourse. The focus on these concepts was specifically on their application as a basis of determining employee remuneration. The paper maintains that most organisations pay line employees higher than staff employees, thereby breeding inter-group conflict in work places. The major effect of preferential treatment to line employees at the expense of staff employees are: industrial disharmony, low productivity, poor working relationship, distrust, envy and conflict. The paper recommended among others the review of laws establishing public organisations like health institutions in order to remove clauses that ensure preference for line personnel. Such action is expected to restore industrial harmony, as well as boost productivity of all employees and the organisations. The paper concluded that preferential wages and salary to line employees demotivates other employees and dampen their morale, resulting to decline of overall productivity.

Keywords: Line, Staff, Wages, Salary, Motivation, Employees, Administration, productivity and organisation

INTRODUCTION

Central to the work of any Human Resource Officer is the role of implementing organizational policies and advising management on how to enhance employees performance in order to ensure efficiency of the organization. In doing this the Human resources officer is confronted with varieties of motivational factors and techniques which are all geared towards boosting employees morale for higher productivity. Such motivational factors include: provision of employees needs, good working conditions, training, promotion, discipline, high wages and salary. Wages and salary becomes the most commonly used motivational factors. The structural dynamics and complexity of the organization are likely to determine if wages and salary are capable of eliciting higher performance from all categories of employees within the organization. Categorization of employees is determined by organizational dynamics, such as the concept of line and staff.

This paper is aimed at broadening our understanding of the concept of line and staff, as well as determining the relationship between line and staff on one hand and wages and salary administration on the other hand, as it affect industrial harmony and productivity of the organization.
CONCEPTS

Five major concepts are very important to this discussion. They are line and staff, salary and wages, and motivation. The concepts need clarification to aid our understanding of their applicability.

**Line and Staff:** There are two broad senses or definitional perspectives to the concept of line and staff, as opined by Koontz, O'Donnell and Weihrich (1980:395). First, the perspective that "Line functions are those which have direct responsibility for accomplishing the objectives of the enterprise, while staff refers to those elements of the organization that help the line to work most effectively in accomplishing the primary objectives of an enterprise. In this regard, such services as accounting and personnel are staff functions in an Engineering firm, while engineering construction is the line function.

Secondly, is the focus on line and staff in terms of functional relationship to authority within an organization. From this point of view, line constitutes "that relationship in which, a superior exercises direct supervision over a subordinate - an authority relationship in direct line" (Koontz, O'Donnell and Weihrich, 1980:397). To this end, "the nature of staff relationship is advisory". The advisory role of staff does not place staff officers within the hierarchy of authority in the organization. From which ever angle one is likely to focus on these two perspectives of line and staff are interwoven, and thus, perspective two merely becomes an alternative explanation. This can be buttressed with a simple organogram.

**LINE AND STAFF IN NEWSPAPER PUBLISHING COMPANY**

![Organogram of Line and Staff in Newspaper Publishing Company]

From the diagram above, it is worthy to note that the controller of Administration and Finance often have operating activities in addition to purely staff responsibilities.
Salaries and Wages: Generally, salary refers to a fixed amount of money paid for the utilization of human labour (Ilyin and Motylev 1986:380). Ubeku (1975) noted that salary is paid for a longer duration; monthly quarterly or yearly in white collar jobs. Wages are fixed regular payment made to an employee especially a manual worker for shorter duration, this is daily or weekly. Salary comprises a good number of sub-heads of payment to employee, and includes: Basic salary, utility, rent allowance, luncheon; meal subsidy; transport; journal allowance, call-duty allowance, shift duty allowance, overtime allowance, etc. The application of these allowances vary from profession to profession and from organization to organization, thereby resulting in wage or salary differential among professions, and organizations.

Motivation: Nwachukwu (1988:181) defines motivation as "there energizing force that induces or compels and maintains behaviour". There are three major approaches to motivation, namely, need approach; incentive, reward and punishment approach; and task structure approach. There are various theories of motivation such as McGregor theory X and Y, John Adair Functional theory, Blake and Mouton Managerial Grid theory, Herzberg Hygiene-Motivation theory etc. (Ubeku 1975) all fall within the first two approaches, while the third approach comprises such personnel management techniques as job enrichment, jobs enlargement, job design and job rotation etc.

Ubeku (1975) identified remuneration as a basic factor of motivation, because it is through payment of salary that the physiological needs of individual within the organization as postulated by Abraham Maslow (comprising food, cloth, shelter and sexual satisfaction) can be achieved. Therefore, salary and wage administration which is one of the most commonly applied motivational factors need to be examined within the context of complex organization with conflictual internal dynamics of line and staff relationship.

IMPLICATIONS OF LINE AND STAFF ON SALARY DRIVEN MOTIVATION: A DIAGNOSTIC OF COMPLEX ORGANIZATIONS

All Human Resource officers operate within the confines of an organization, which is "the planned coordination of the activities of a number of people for the achievement of some common, explicit purpose or goal, through division of labour and function, and through a hierarchy of authority and responsibility, (Schein, 1990:15). The organization strives to achieve the objectives for which it was established, the achievement of which is central to its survival. To efficiently realize its objectives, managers in organization have to motivate employees through high and sustainable salary, which can help them satisfy their numerous needs. The definitions above suit a formal work group organization whether public or private. An organization is complex when it can be segmented into different groups of employees with diversity of professions. Most complex organizations are line and staff where decisions are made by line executives with the advice of staff executives, who are experts in their fields like accountants and personnel officers.

This concept of line and staff dichotomizes employees in organization into two major groups. The line group and the staff group. Administration of wages in some organisations do follow these two groupings strictly. Wages and salaries are subject to negotiations in the organized private sectors and there is the same provision in the public sector, with the National Commission for wages and salaries as the Apex institution in public service salary determination in Nigeria.

The line employees in most organizations are well organized into industrial unions through which they negotiate with their employers for salary and other benefits. The bargaining power of this line oriented industrial organizations are strong because any industrial action (e.g strike) by them are likely to disrupt the entire activities of the organization (Yusufu, 1984). Therefore, management is often compelled to comply with line industrial unions at the expense of the staff unions, where the later even exists.
The staff industrial unions are not as strong as their line counterpart, because their actions are not likely to halt the entire organizational processes to a stand-still. Therefore, management is not bound to comply with staff unions' demands to their utmost satisfaction and desires. In an organization where line and staff employees coexist, the situation is bound to bring about industrial conflict and disharmony, which, Yusufu (1984:147) defined as a disagreement between a trade union and an employer or group of employers following failure of the one side to meet the demand of the other for the amelioration or removal of a grievance or grievances" leading to various forms of industrial action such as: go slow; work to rule; strike; lock-out" the effects of which are diverse both to the workers and to the organization.

Now our focus shifts to wages and salary, which are considered to be factors of motivation. Where management succumbs to the demands of line employees in terms of salary increase without corresponding increase of staff employee's salary there is going to exist wage differential within the organization. The resultant effect has a lot of implications towards employees and organizational performance.

**Effects on Staff:** Motivation is all about increasing the output of employees but how a particular drive factor like wages is administered may rather demotivates. Where certain employees are paid higher than others due to differential incentives, those with less pay are demotivated. The staff employees who are affected feel less important and irrelevant to organizational success. According to Umoren (1990) they are likely to express withdrawal tendency and alienation from work. There the productivity of staff employees overtly declined towards zero level.

**Effects on Organization:** The line employees cannot function effectively well without the Cooperation and support of staff employees (Nwachukwu, 1985). Thus, the attempt by line officers to steer the organization ahead will meet with total frustration. Hence, the organization can not move forward and achieve the objectives for which it was set to achieve. Let us briefly examine two cases.

**CASES OF LINE AND STAFF CONFLICT**

There are some citable cases of Line and Staff conflict regarding salary administration in Nigeria. Prominent among which are the University Industrial Crisis of the 80's and 90's as well as the Health institutions' crisis. In the University, there are two categories of employee, namely; The Academic staff, and Non Academic Staff. Academic staff are teaching staff whose functions correlate directly with the aims and objectives for which Universities were established. Thus academic staff are line employees while non-academic are staff employees. The industrial disputes of the 80's and 90's and even of today have been continuous demands for increased take home pay by academic staff. Most times these demands are through increase of academic allowances viz; journal, research, examination supervision etc. These allowances are not applicable to non-academic staff and often result in the staff employees taking home less than their academic counterparts in the same salary scale and step. The greatest problem is that of increase in basic salary with the introduction of different salary scales: UASS (consolidated University Academic Staff Salary Scale) and CONTISS (Consolidated Tertiary Institution Salary Scale) this kind of problem often leads to further strike by non-academic staff who feel alienated in the scheme of things. The University cannot function well without Accountants, Personnel Officers, Engineer, Cleaner, Technologists, Demonstrators, Porters, Security-men etc who are all non-academic staff. Hence, they deserve certain compensation as being within the system, because they are all experts in their own fields.

This problem becomes more complex in tertiary Health Institutions like Specialist and Teaching Hospitals. Here, the line employees are sub-categorized, like doctors, Nurses, Pharmacists, Physiotherapists, Radiologist etc., operating side by side with non-clinical staff like administrators, caterers, accountants, engineers and technicians. The Clinical staff are line staff with strong unions like...
A. R. D. (Association of Resident Doctors), NANNM (National Association of Nigerian Nurses and Midwives) etc. while the other staff employees lack unions with strong cohesion and binding force to negotiate increased pay. The true picture of this situation can be revealed in the two weeks ultimatum for government to review what Medical Technologists and Professions Allied to Medicine (NUPMTPAM) described as "the discriminating package of incentives just approved for medical workers (Vanguard June 20, 2001).

Similar warning was given by Senior Staff Associating of Nigerian Universities (SSANU) that "the Federal Government should ensure that no disparity exists on the basic salary structure of University staff as such that will engender disharmony in the system'. From these two examples it is clearly revealed that salary administration is a difficult task as it pertains to line and staff organization. What then can a human resource officer do?

THE DILEMMA OF HUMAN RESOURCE OFFICER

Industrial relation is a core Human Resource Management function and part of the schedule of any personnel officer (Ubeku, 1975), but it is not uncommon for it to be under the Corporate or Public Affairs department. But where-ever Industrial Relations is located, it is the personnel officer who will be directed to query, dismiss or terminate the appointment of staff who engage in industrial action, as a result of which the personnel manager becomes a key player in industrial relation management.

In public sector organizations, as exemplified in the two cases above, the personnel officer is one of the victims. He is considered as a staff officer, whether in the University, Hospital, Banks or Factory, but his functions and effectiveness are critical to the success or failure of the organization, as he manages the most critical, and important variable or resource of the organization (Human Resource). He is the instrument of actualization of management policy which may also be to his detriment. He discovers himself as not being part of the line (Production) or direct hierarchical (authority), nor part and parcel of management. But his actions are wholly implementation of management decisions, he is thus seen by other staff employees as representing management and being part of it. This is the very dilemma of the personnel manager.

Despite the situation the personnel manager finds himself, he perform his function with utmost efficiency by ensuring industrial harmony in the organization, advising management in all aspects necessary to ensure industrial peace, harmony and the co-operation of all employees to achieve organizational goals. This can only be achieve if certain conditions are put in place, as provided for in the recommendations hereunder, specifically for preventing salary differential on line staff dichotomy.

RECOMMENDATION /CONCLUSION

To herald other recommendations is the recommendations contained in one of the communique of the 2001 Annual Industrial Relations Forum of the Institute of Personnel management of Nigeria (The Punch June 18, 2001), that:

"Corporate organizations in the public and private sectors should integrate HRM into their corporate strategic management process and recognize the HR practitioner as an internal consultant to line managers who should be assisted to perform traditional personnel functions to enable the HR practitioner focus more on strategic human resources issues’’

If this is taken, the perception of other employees about the personnel officer will change to a more positive comradeship relationship, and the personnel manager will have more time to focus on strategic functions including industrial relations. Public institutions like the University and other semi-autonomous institutions should be given power of wage determination and administration. There
should be machinery for collective negotiation in sectors with multiple industrial unions to ensure harmony, equity and fairness. More training and re-training programmes should be given to Personnel Officers/Industrial Relations Officer as well as unionists in public and private organizations in various aspect of industrial relations, conflict resolution to ensure industrial harmony in our organizations. To this end, the Nigerian Institute of Personnel Management should Champion Industrial Relation education in our country.

In conclusion, line and staff is a critical issue in the administration of wages and salary, which must be closely studied and analyzed by Human Resource officer in any organization, in order to advise management accordingly to avoid wage and salary differential which is likely to disrupt industrial harmony and hinder the realization of organizational goal. Public and private sector should harmonise salary to prevent disparity in order to foster industrial peace, which is a necessary ingredient of productivity and corporate survival.

REFERENCES

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