Broadcast Management in Nigeria: The systems approach as an imperative

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Abstract: Approaches to the management of organizations are numerous. Many of them however fall within the three popular schools of management, namely: Classical/Formal; Human Angle/Public Relations; and Modern schools. Through a comparative analysis of the several approaches, this paper identifies those that are most suited to the management of broadcasting in developing societies like Nigeria. The chosen approaches are then reviewed to underscore the merits of each of them for easy assimilation by any broadcast manger. In the process, the paper observes that whereas it is easy to follow some management techniques adopted by many successful broadcast stations such as good personnel recruitment and training policies, total quality management and effective leadership, it is not similarly easy to emulate how others handled or are handling the crucial nature of their organization’s environment because every environment has its own peculiarities. The paper therefore recommends the adoption of systems approach particularly its macro dimension which readily provides for the management of environmental impact of an organization alongside the effective coordination of the organization’s internal processes and procedures. It is envisaged that such a combined posture would illuminate how best to manage a broadcast station especially in a developing society.

Key terms: Management, Organization, Broadcasting, Systems approach, Developing societies.

I. General Background

The mass media can be classified into 2 groups – Print and Electronic. While the Print refers generally to Newspapers and Magazines, the Electronic refers to that form which uses audio-visual instruments to produce and disseminate content to listeners and viewers. Although, Fax, Film, Internet and Satellite are fast gaining popularity as new forms of the electronic media, they are usually not taken to be part of what is known as broadcasting which consists essentially of Radio and Television—a viewpoint that is also adopted in this paper. Broadcasting being a vibrant occupation of glamour and a subject, which virtually everyone is familiar with, is not difficult to define. Indeed, whenever broadcasting is mentioned, most people consciously or subconsciously relate to their radio and television sets from which they receive broadcast signals every day in their homes and offices. It is however a delicate business because of its pervasive power, which is universally accepted as the most potent of all media, forms uncontrolling and directing public opinion, taste and behaviour. Interestingly, that the process, which produces such powerful signals, has to be organized and managed by a structured body is usually taken for granted. In reality however, a radio or a television signal is the end product of a broadcast station, which operates as an organization. Onabajo (2004, p1) makes this point clearer with his definition of the term, broadcasting as “the dissemination of information by an organization (radio or television) to a large widely dispersed heterogeneous audience through radio or television receivers.” In other words, a broadcast station is a distinctive organization which is a well thought-out instrument for the utilization of human and material resources for the production and transmission of broadcast content to inform, educate and entertain listeners and viewers. This may involve the establishment of a structure in which there are departments headed by executives who are directly responsible to a superior officer. Such an arrangement allows for control over the departments and at the same time enhances departmental autonomy and interdepartmental cooperation.

II. Broadcast organization

As an organization, a broadcast station can be operated in several forms; it can be an entity under a public corporation or authority whose business is wholly or partly owned by the state and controlled through a public authority. In Nigeria, the Federal Government controls the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN) and the Voice of Nigeria (VON) just as many state governments control state-government owned media. All such public broadcasting outfits are expected to be operated in the public interest hence, they enjoy subvention from public funds and other advantages not available to their private sector competitors. But unlike the latter, they suffer from certain constraints like undue interference by governments even in matters that are either routine or professional (Iwokwagh, 2005). Broadcasting can also operate under a partnership blend of public authorities and private interests or even entirely under private management.
Whether the ownership of a broadcasting outfit should be public or private has remained contentious. There are arguments in support of both. On one hand, there is the viewpoint that private ownership of broadcasting often increases competition and reduces the concentration of power. In addition, where government decides to erode the autonomy of a public outfit, the interest of society cannot be served. This argument is supported by what happened in Mexico where the privatization of broadcasting in 1989 led to the exposure of massive corruption scandals in government (Nelson, 1999). On the other hand, it can be argued that whereas private ownership of the media may lead to the reflection of only the views of a narrow group in society, public broadcasting is more capable of exposing society to desirable socio-economic and political values. A case in point is Australia’s national broadcaster which also operates according to the Australian Broadcasting Corporation’s Annual Report (1999-2000) as the nation’s major cultural organization with a mandate to among other things inform, entertain and contribute to a sense of national identity and reflect Australia’s regional and cultural diversity. Heterogeneous societies in the developing world, would perceptibly require public broadcasting. Atoyebi (2001, p18) seems to see this as the explanation for the mandate of Nigeria’s main radio broadcast station-the FRCN which is “to ensure that its programme services when considered as a whole reflect the unity of Nigeria as a federation and at the same time give adequate expression to the culture, characteristics, affairs and opinions of the people of each region or part of the federation.”

Its television counterpart-the NTA is similarly mandated. According to a press release issued by the military government of General Olusegun Obasanjo on December 10, 1975, the establishment of the NTA was done “to respond to and fulfill national views rather than partisan or sectional interests.” It is therefore not in doubt that public broadcasting can be positioned to facilitate a nation’s growth and stability by serving as a tool for national integration. But whether the ownership of a broadcast outfit will be more desirable under a private rather than a public concern can neither be answered in a vacuum nor can it be informed by the history or experiences of only one nation. Instead, the nature of the relevant society, particularly its level of development has to be considered. That it is not every public station that is better or worse than a private station is however not in contention as each category has both successful and failed stations. What this suggests is that how a broadcast outfit is run is crucial; hence, the main concern of this paper is to examine how best to manage a broadcast station particularly in a developing society so that it can survive over time and remain viable

III. The Essence of Broadcast Management

It is difficult to appreciate the essence of a phenomenon without first knowing what the phenomenon is. If so, what does the term “management” entail? What looks like the simplest definition of the term is that of Mary Parker Follet, the acclaimed prophet of management, who sees it simply as the art of getting things done through people (Snider, 1998). In which case, people have to be assembled and coordinated to achieve a specified goal. If so, it becomes obvious that every organisation ought to be managed. In the case of broadcasting, the expedience of applying management principles to its processes and procedures cannot be over estimated. To start with, a broadcast station is ideally expected to run a non-stop transmission. Thus, broadcast personnel who are to make it happen must not only know what to do but must also know when, where and how to do it. Material resources for starting and keeping transmission going must also be judiciously deployed; meaning that broadcasting requires planning and coordination. Without that, transmission can at a point be faulted or adversely interfered with. In developing societies like Nigeria where public power supply is epileptic, a simple item, like the supply of diesel for stand-by generators if not managed can frustrate transmission. Indeed, the need to have a coordinator in a broadcast outfit becomes clearer when it is realized that the industry accommodates several interrelated but virtually inseparable assignments.

For instance, news production requires many actors and actions because news items have to be gathered by reporters and edited by editors while presenters have to cast the news. The absence of any of these inseparable actions and actors can mar the achievement of the goal of acquainting the public with the latest happenings around them and elsewhere. The same is true of other forms of broadcast content such as current affairs, drama, documentaries, jingles etc. Thus, broadcasting is a process which requires ample synergy thereby confirming the inevitability of applying management principles to the system. Such an application does not end with the coordination of the activities of one unit because the inseparable broadcast assignments cut across units, sections, divisions, departments and directorates depending on the structure of a station. Data gathering and production operatives in News and Programmes would now and again require the collaboration of engineers and other technical operatives in the maintenance of facilities like cameras and plants.

Broadcasting is capital intensive; as a result broadcast stations particularly television requires huge funding which is often hard to get. In developing economies, public stations get subventions annually from government and as such are usually better funded than their privately owned counterparts. For this reason, the
Broadcasting is premised on technology and because technology keeps changing by the day, a station, which is not properly managed, is not likely to benefit from the use of the latest facilities. In which case except the management of a station is proactive, obsolete and analogue facilities could mar the efforts of its operatives. The same fate could more easily befall a broadcast station in the area of regulation. Indeed, the need to apply management principles to broadcasting has become more obvious since 2004 when the deadline on the transition to digital broadcasting was conceived by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU). Again, part of the task of managing a station involves monitoring and ensuring compliance with all relevant injunctions and directions. In Nigeria, the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) which was established in 1992is empowered to regulate broadcasting in the country. The powers of the Commission are quite enormous to the extent that it can revoke the operating license of a station. The commission has a number of provisions in its broadcasting code that must not be breached. To do otherwise, is to place the fate of a station in jeopardy. Bearing in mind that it is not enough to survive but to be viable and profitable, care must be taken to evolve a management technique or approach that can ensure increased productivity, efficiency and effectiveness of a station.

IV. Management Approaches

Several approaches exist for managing organizations. Skipton (1983) identifies as many as eleven. In this paper, the focus is on those which fall within the three main management schools known as a) Formal/Classical, b) Human Angle/Public Relations and c) Modern. Each school has its strengths and weaknesses, making obvious that the best approach to management is probably an aggregation of the different teachings of all the schools. It is therefore necessary to undertake an overview of each of them so as to throw light on their features for easy application by a manager who is anxious to succeed.

a. Formal/Classical School

The emergence of the Classical or Formal School of Management occurred immediately after the industrial revolution when the predominant concern in the management of a project was how to increase workers’ productivity. In other words, theorists that belong to the school looked out for how to continuously improve the means of production so as to increase productivity. In the United States of America, the leading member of the school was a mechanical engineer-Frederick Winslow Taylor who referred to in many circles as the father of scientific management. He called for the systematic analysis of every task and the identification of which worker was best suited for a particular task (Taylor, 1967). In France, the most prominent member of the classical school was Henri Fayol- a mining executive. According to Fayol, an organization can best be managed through what he sees as the technique of administrative management (Fayol, 1949). For easy adoption of the approach, Fayol evolved 14 principles of management, namely: Division of work; Authority & Responsibility; Discipline; Unity of Command; Unity of Direction; Subordination of individual to general interest; Remuneration; Centralization; Scalar Chain; Order; Equity; Stability of tenure of personnel; Initiative and Esprit de corps. In Germany, the embodiment of the Classical School was Max Weber-a sociologist who theorized that an enterprise would function best if organized under some empirical order of chain of command (hierarchy) or official procedure (bureaucracy). One of the advantages which Weber (1947) attributes to this approach is that it can easily establish who does what, when where and how in an organization

b. Human Angle School

The approach of the Human Angle School to management is that whereas the physical conditions in an organization are important, they are not as crucial as worker-behaviour. Professor, Elton Mayo, of the Harvard Business School was one of the earliest scholars to confirm this viewpoint through the famous Hawthorne Experiment. Mayo and his colleagues involved in the Hawthorne experiment came to the conclusion that organizations are human cooperative systems rather than mechanical contraptions. Professor Abraham Maslow, a psychologist added his voice to the Human Angle stand-point through his theory on employee motivation.
Considering that the needs and wants of workers are many and different, it is necessary to itemise and arrange them in what Maslow long ago described as the ‘Hierarchy of Needs’ so as to be able to apply the appropriate incentive which can motivate a particular worker to attain higher productivity at a given point in time. The needs identified and arranged in an ascending order by Maslow (1965) are: i) Physiological needs—basic needs such as food, clothing, water, shelter etc. upon which human beings depend for survival; ii) Safety and security needs which have to do with the need to be free from any threat or danger; iii) Social needs—the need to belong and to feel accepted by others; iv) Esteem and egoistic needs: which have to do with self-confidence and the recognition by others of one’s peculiar endowment, qualities and special talents; and v) Self-actualization—relating to self-fulfilment where a person has opportunity to maximize his potentials.

Douglas McGregor an industrial psychologist also a member of the Human Angle School doubted the efficacy of a blanket provision of incentives to every worker in the same manner. He thus moderated the essence of motivation in an organization with his ‘Theory X and Y’ approach. He suggested that workers should be divided into two, a) those that lack ambition and show little interest in work and b) those that can exercise self control and show considerable sense of responsibility. According to McGregor (1960), while Theory X which calls for control and threat should apply to workers in the first group, Theory Y which offers workers ample opportunities for initiative and discretion should be applied to the second group.

c. Modern School
Prominent among the approaches in this school are: Leadership, Management by Objectives and Total Quality Management. A frontline leadership theorist is Warren Bennis who opines that for an organization to be effective; its leadership must have vision, passion and integrity (Bennis, 1989). Indeed, what an organization requires in earnest according to Bennis is not managers but leaders who can lead by example. Considering that a leader must necessarily have followers to be used to achieve the goals of an organization, it is necessary to aggregate the contributions of such followers to the growth of the organization. Peter Drucker, a management theorist, probably had this in mind when he developed the approach known as ‘Management by Objectives’ (MBO). The approach entailed the sharing of an entity’s objectives among employees, units and departments for individual and sectoral implementation (Drucker, 1967). A significant feature of the MBO approach is the fact that Managers and their staff have to reach an agreement on how each operative must perform over a given period in time. This no doubt is useful in performance evaluation. If all operatives perform well, an aggregation of their collective performance could in the view of Connor (1992) cited in Nwanwene (2010) lead to “Total Quality Management” (TQM), an approach which can propel each worker to add value through his own performance to his organization. Tari (2005) draws attention to certain components required to make TQM a success. These include selecting multi talented operatives and defining clear and unambiguous expectations for them as well as focusing on the strength of each operative and helping each operative to fit rightly in the system.

The relevance of the 3 management schools to Nigeria’s broadcasting sector
Like many other heterogeneous societies, Nigeria with its multiplicity of ethnic groups can experience, now and again excessive competitive ethnicity. Consequently, while some persons get appointed into positions for which they are not qualified, others are promoted to positions above their level of competence only to attain representative bureaucracy that is premised on such prescriptive criteria as state of origin, ethnicity, religion, gender and family background. To make matters worse, such privileged operatives are hardly amenable to discipline. As Ahonsi (2009) argues, the situation in Nigerian organizations features incompetence and irresponsibility, which routinely go unpunished once the perpetrators have the ‘right’ connections. The high level of primordial sentiments which gave birth to the situation is sustained by the Nigerian Constitution (1999) which in its Section 14 provides that “the composition of the Government of the Federation or any of its agencies and the conduct of its affairs shall be carried out in such a manner as to reflect the federal character of Nigeria.” The problem is really not with the provision but with the practice in which it gets honoured only in its letter; the spirit of the provision, which is to ensure that every person appointed from each state, merits the appointment is hardly considered. Yet, Frederick Taylor’s scientific management did not envisage a situation where a manager has to drop the best applicant for a weaker one in order to suit a federal character principle.

Therefore, a Nigerian broadcast station especially public broadcasting may neither get the best hands nor bother to follow the systematic analysis of every task and the identification of which worker is best suited for a particular task. It may be similarly hard to attract multi-talented operatives that can individually add value to a station as envisaged by the ‘Total Quality Management’ approach considering the high level of inadequacy of resources in Nigeria’s broadcast sector. This is probably more obvious in private media organizations which hire only a few hands so as to cut costs. In the public media which are supposedly more viable, there are also not enough trained hands. The movement of broadcasting from the exclusive to the concurrent legislative list by the
1979 constitution and the deregulation of broadcasting in 1992 which empowered individuals to own stations created some problems. One of such problems in the words of Aderiye (2003, p36) is the “proliferation of broadcasting stations without corresponding or complimenting level of skilled manpower to service them” because of the failure of government to order “a national survey as well as a forecast of the long and short term manpower requirements of the entire national broadcasting industry”. This seems to explain why the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) – the nation’s largest television station still had the same figure of less than 4000 staff to run 68 stations in 2008 as it had, when there were only 27 stations in 1999 (Iredia, 2012).

As for material resources, the media are poorly funded in Nigeria making it hard for them to be adequately equipped for good performance. Even in a large broadcasting network like the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN), inadequate facilities greatly mar the performance of the staff. A former chief Executive of the FRCN, Eddie Iroh told an international audience in Luanda, Angola that whereas the rest of the world was moving on to digital broadcasting, Nigeria’s technology remained largely analogue. According to Iroh (2003), “On assumption of duty, the level of decay of FRCN’s infrastructure shocked me. Apart from capital grant, little or no recurrent funds were given to Radio Nigeria. This seriously limited its capacity to achieve its objectives.” The television service has not had a better deal either. During the budget defence for the year 2004, the NTA revealed that it did not get even the capital grant given to Radio. As Director-General of that service, this writer received a zero capital allocation every year from 2003-8. This confirms the earlier findings of Lasode (1994) that the problem faced by television stations especially the NTA continues to be under-staffing, under-equipment and under-funding.

Another challenge which cannot be over-looked is the poor remuneration of Nigerian media workers. In the case of the public media, the problem has to do with the civil service structure. While civil servants in the country work for only 8 hours a day and 5 days a week, public media staff work round the clock daily and throughout the week. Yet, the remuneration package for both categories is the same which is based on the grade level system. Again public broadcasters appear discriminated against because for two consecutive years, 2005 and 2006, they had to embark on strike to draw attention to the failure of government to include them in the payment of monetisation benefits which other categories of public officers had enjoyed as of right in 2003 and 2004. Their two unions – the Radio, Television and Theatre Workers Union (RATTAWU) and the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ) cried aloud in vain that government reneged on agreements it reached with them on the subject (Odugala, 2006).

The more worrisome aspect of the poor remuneration arrangement for media workers is the one in many privately owned stations where there are no regular salaries and in which staff are exposed to unethical practices just to obtain some means of livelihood. As Garba (1998) confirms, media workers in Nigeria are not only poorly paid they also sometimes work for as long as 6 months and beyond without any pay. The challenge here is that such workers are exposed to the influence of materialism which can becloud their professional sense of judgment in the performance of their duties. With such poor funding, how can broadcast managers in Nigeria embrace Maslow’s hierarchy of needs proposal?

As for leadership approach to management, an obvious difficulty that Nigerian broadcast managers are likely to face is that although a good leader is no doubt useful to his organization, leadership is not an independent variable. It is often subjected to other features like Group, Followership, Situations and Environment. Accordingly, it may not be enough for broadcast leaders to have the qualities of vision, passion and integrity recommended by Warren Bennis as such leaders may also have to face undue pressure from their owners, be they government or private entrepreneurs. Quite often, ownership control renders nugatory, benefits which should have accrued to a station on account of the professional disposition of its leaders. In political broadcasts for example, the inability of the media to meet public expectations in Nigeria is partly due to ownership control which tends to hinder excellent performance in the business. As Oguejiofor-Abugu (2008, p11) found during the 2007 general elections ‘most state governors turned the media in their states funded with tax payers’ money into an instrument of self glorification and vendetta against political opponents, real or imagined.” Thus, the Nigerian experience has been that a proprietor of a media organization can determine at will, editorial policy, direction and indeed the entire content of his medium making it hard for Nigerian broadcast stations to maintain balance and objectivity in their coverage especially where their sponsors are either candidates at an election or have considerable interests in certain political parties and their candidates. There is therefore a strong correlation between the posture of those in control of the media and the professional performance of their workers.
The Systems Approach
From the above assessment, it is obvious that a body set up to implement a project has to be vast in management principles and at the same time possess the wherewithal to adhere to the principles. But whereas the approaches are all useful, they all seem to underplay the crucial issue of the environment which the systems approach appropriately covers. First, the approach incorporates all other approaches because it endorses the viewpoint of Goldhaber (1974) that an organization is an open living social system with its connecting parts functioning in the hands of people. Put differently, the systems approach recognizes that because an organization is more or less a network, the ideal operational approach is to allow for the integration of the functioning of its different parts (Vincent, 2002). This posture is particularly persuasive because the mal-functioning of any part can have grave adverse effects on the whole. More importantly, the approach has a macro perspective which suggests that in assessing the performance of an organization, the environment in which the entity operates is crucial and should not be over-looked. This is because no organization can afford to be an isolated entity. As a result, managers must be conscious of environmental factors which they must necessarily contend with while running their organizations.

Broadcasting and the Nigerian Environment
Nigerians generally agree that their nation has for long underperformed in virtually every facet of national development, broadcasting inclusive. What underlines this poor performance according to Ohuabunwa (2010) “is largely poor governance exhibited by the three elements of: poor national planning, poor implementation, poor utilization of resources (human, financial and material).” Ohuabunwa’s statement in our view points at poor management arising from the peculiarity of the nation’s political and socio-economic environment. For example, since the return of democracy to the nation in 1999, every Nigerian government has always assured its citizens that it would ensure public power supply. Indeed, the government of President UmaruYar’Adua (2007-2010) went one step ahead of its predecessors who often made vague promises by pronouncing an estimated figure of thousands of electricity megawatts it would deliver at the end of its first year in office. Till date, the power supply situation is yet to change. What this implies is that Nigerian broadcast managers have to strive to overcome the overwhelming challenges of producing and transmitting broadcast signals under epileptic power supply conditions. They have to rely more on generating plants and also seek to generate enough funds for maintaining the facility.

It is therefore not sufficient to be vast in management principles if the required enabling environment is defective. It is difficult for instance to appreciate how the federal government of Nigeria arrived at the site of its Television station in Asaba, Delta State which because of unsuitable location, transmits more to River Niger than to the Delta people. In other countries, suitability of location arising from feasibility studies rather than political considerations determine how projects are initiated and deployed. In other words, it is unwise to embark on recruiting talented operatives if a station is uninhabitable due to poor structure, location and access to strategic infrastructure like roads. Otherwise, embracing Maslow’s ‘hierarchy of needs’ or implementing Douglas McGregor’s Theory X and Y; would be a fruitless venture. The point is therefore clear that managing a station includes managing the impact which its environment imposes on her. This is what puts the systems approach above many other management approaches.

People in the immediate environment of a broadcast station are also crucial because they are its closest stakeholders. Their tastes, disposition, nuances and demands cannot be ignored. Being the real target audience of a broadcast station, what they want to read, hear or watch ought to determine the nature and philosophy of the content which the station transmits or else the station may become irrelevant to the society in which it is located. Indeed, many people in different parts of the world particularly parents are known to constantly regulate the interaction of their young ones with the broadcast media in order to prevent them from imbibing negative attributes from media content. Even in Europe which is usually regarded as made up of liberal and rather permissive societies, parents have been quite vocal about media effects on children. In the UK, Sherwin (2005) recorded hundreds of parents who publicly complained that their youngest children suffered nightmares from a television film which featured “Killer Zombies” in Victoria Cardiff on April 9, 2005. Broadcast managers in response to such public perception; deliberately organize their programme schedules such that adult-related programmes as well as materials on crime and violence are not transmitted at a time when the youths can have easy access to radio and television. That environmental factors greatly influence broadcast management is thus not in doubt. In earnest, many managers and their operatives are quite often products of the immediate environment of their stations.
Beyond the immediate environment of a typical broadcast station, the general societal disposition to the media is another issue that cannot be overlooked. In Nigeria, media practitioners hardly see their nation’s environment as enabling enough for the practice of their profession. Police brutality alone can justify their fears. In February 2002 for instance, Journalists were not only beaten up by the Police but their “still and television cameras were seized by security operatives on the occasion of an address by former British Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair to the Nigerian National Assembly. It was as reported by Mume (2007), a horrible day for Journalists. Reacting to what was described as a ferocious attack on 9 Journalists in Abuja on Tuesday January 4, 2005, the International Press Centre (IPC) reminded the nation that “it is a well known fact that even in war situations, journalists are normally protected (Alabadan, 2005, p2). In September 2003, when the Police beat up a properly identified Reporter who was covering the coronation of Oba Akiolu I, of Lagos, the Vanguard (2003, p1) concluded that “the episode points to the fact that we do not have a Police whose attitude matches these times”. According to the paper, the Police had no excuse for the despicable behaviour because, this time, the journalist was not covering agitation; he was covering an era for history. Broadcast managers must therefore include the nature of the environment and its impact on their stations in their management strategic plans.

V. Conclusion

A broadcast station which adopts a blend of the theories of the three approaches referred to in this paper is likely to attain a high degree of integration among its component parts because each school of management has its strengths and weaknesses. There is no guarantee that a new idea which belongs to a collective staff strength as sure that an efficient workforce is also effective, the station would need to adopt such self but a forple as a thermostat and operate, including a b

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