

PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT IN LEADERSHIP SELECTION: IMPLICATIONS FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

The paper examined the problems and consequences associated with leadership selection processes in Nigeria. It posited that the Nation's underdevelopment in all its ramifications revolves around poor leadership quality resulting from deficiencies in selection processes. It noted that selection (election) processes in Nigeria are devoid of strategies that yield good quality and effective leadership. The paper asserted that in order to ensure effective leadership that is development-oriented, psychological assessment must be an indispensable part and parcel of the selection process.

INTRODUCTION

The Nigerian polity has gone through several transitional experiments ranging from civilian through military dictatorship to "democracy" since its emergence as an independent nation in 1960. On very close observation, it could be asserted that Nigerians have experienced unprecedented retrogression in all ramifications as opposed to the desired goals of growth and development being the dream of the nation's political fathers (notably Zik of Africa and Abubakar Tafawa Balewa) who fought tirelessly to earn Nigeria her independence on October 1, 1960. There had been persistent economic, political and socio-psychological crises. The crises manifest in declining income, unemployment, hyperinflation, thuggery, insecurity, pervasive stress-related disorders, instability in governance, poor standard of education, technological dependence, bribery and corruption and a host of other ills plaguing the society. According to Ifesinachi (2000), these problems of low productivity, vulnerability in international economic relations, unemployment, etc. have posed formidable obstacles to Nigeria's political and economic development. He noted that government institutions have been plagued by instability due to perennial crises in political leadership. Achebe (1983) observed that the trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure in leadership. He posited that the Nigerian problem is unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to their responsibility: to the challenge of persona I example - which are the hallmarks of true leadership. Achebe (1983) concluded that Nigeria has been less fortunate in its leadership. In reminiscence, he noted that the kind of political thought articulated and pursued by our fathers is the type that produces aggressive millionaires rather than selfless leaders of their people. This assertion could be buttressed by the outrageous manner with which our leaders acquire wealth. If not, how does one explain the fact that a leader can accumulate money to the tune of trillions of Naira while the entire nation is in debt. Well-known cases of Nigerian leaders who became too rich abound. Greater percentage of past Nigerian leaders cannot claim innocence of embezzlement or-public funds. Think of any Nigerian leader that has not been accused! i: fraudulent enrichment of personal account. For instance, Chigbo (2005) reported that Tafa Balogun, former Inspector-

General of Police, was involved in fraud to the tune of N9 billion towards the end of 2005 and N26 billion during the 2003 elections. Osundare (2002) outlined some of the accusations leveled against Na'Abba, former Speaker of the House of Representatives, on corrupt spending of public funds. Deprieye Alamieyeseigha, former Governor of Bayelsa, was accused of fraud worth more than N1.25 billion (Ajaero and Yornanue 2003). Ojewale (2004) reported that Useni (former Finance Minister of the Federal Capital Territory), Anthony Ani (former Finance Minister), Paul Ogwuma (former CBN Governor), Tafia dalhatu (former Minister of Power and Steel) Gwarzo (former National Security Adviser) and late Sani Abacha (former Military President of Nigeria) were investigated and found to have corruptly enriched themselves. More recently in national dailies and Network news, past leaders Senators, Governors, and Ministers were accused of corruption. Including the most recently impeached Speaker of the Federal House of Representatives, Mrs. Patricia Ette. The crime of embezzlement of public funds is not only committed by the presidents, governors and legislators. It is a known fact that any office of trust and responsibility entrusted to out people is defrauded be it in institutions, social organizations, professional associations, etc., cases of embezzlement abound. This could explain why some people stake their lives as they struggle to occupy such leadership positions.

ELECTION AND LEADERSHIP SELECTION

Election is a socio-political process that aims at producing individuals who occupy positions of authority in geopolitical and social communities. It could be the position of a president of a country, the governor of a state, members of legislative houses, chairmen of local government councils, presidents of a social group like village associations, youth organizations, professional bodies etc. The essence of election is to select somebody of proven integrity to pilot the affairs of the group by influencing the behaviour of others (followers) as well as formulate and execute policies that lead to desired goals of the group. In fact, the ultimate aim of election is to produce leaders who will move the nation forward politically, economically, socially, psychologically, technologically and otherwise. Somebody who will be development-oriented.

In other words, election IS a process of leadership selection. Kontz (1980) defined leadership as the art or process of influencing people so that they will strive willingly towards the achievement of group goals. Flippo I (1980) saw it as the process of motivating and directing others towards accomplishment of goals. Katz & Kahn (1966) saw it as the attribute of a position; as the characteristics of a person and as a category of behavioural and relational concepts. These definitions imply two terms: the influencing agent (leader) and the person influenced (follower). It is a process that depends on the person, properties of the situation and of the people to be led.

During election periods, an electoral body is constituted to screen the aspirants to various offices, monitor and conduct elections. Interested members of the society the politicians are screened by the electoral board (e.g. in Nigeria, we have Independent National Electoral Commission). The screening exercise focuses on socio-economic background of the aspirant. Once the person is found "qualified" based on "set criteria" vis-a-vis legally, socially, economically and educationally, the person is cleared and given the mandate to canvass for votes and subsequently contest election into his or her desired office. If this person "wins", he assumed the leadership position.

A cursory look at the electoral process in Nigeria reveals a process bedevilled by corruption, thuggery, violence, killing, rigging, snatching of ballot boxes, etc. Erne quoted in Olagunju, Jinadu and Oyovbaire (1993), noted that because its contender for power, whether at national or regional levels was desperate to retain or gain office, for without office, its chances for capital accumulation would be gravely jeopardized violence and thuggery became synonymous with politics. People killed and were killed in the fight to gain or retain office. Adekanye (1986) noted that with the exception of the general elections held in December 1976; August 1977; and July August, 1977; all the three under the previous military regimes, most of the elections which have been organized since independence had taken place amidst acute inter-political violence including armed thuggery, looting, arson and in some cases even murder. According to Adekanye (1990), almost all elections conducted by post-colonial Nigeria had been characterized by electoral malpractices, corruption, fraud, including rigging of election results and stealing of political seats and offices. Buhari (1984) contends that the shameless rigging and widespread perversion of electoral process could not in all honesty have been said to have produced a government of the people by the people. He noted that what we had through manipulated results both at the Federal and State levels were Government imposed on the people by scandalous use of a mixture of political thuggery and widespread corruption.

The electoral irregularities seem to be worsening. The most recently concluded election of 22 April 29th May, 2007, climaxed the malpractice. In most polling centres, voting never took place but results were collated from such centres. Many lives were lost prior to the proper election dates, ritual killings abound and oath-taking to ensure loyalty was among the ills that characterized the 2007 election. Thus, this kind of electoral process enthrones bastardized democracy championed by corrupt, selfish and insensitive persons whose ultimate goal is personal aggrandizement.

In other words, the leadership selection process in Nigeria starting from the moment of constituting the electoral body through electioneering campaign periods and voting to announcement of results is fraught with unreliability. The electoral body is yet to convince anybody that it is capable of conducting free and fair elections. Leaders are imposed on the electorate and that is why allegations and counter allegations of fraud and rigging abound in post-election periods. Election tribunals are set up to handle such cases. But will election tribunals succeed in redressing the verdict pronounced by the electoral commission as well as forestall future occurrence? This could only be possible if screening of aspirants should involve more than mere asset declaration, past history to ensure that the person is not an ex-convict and educational attainment.

It should delve into the personality profile of the aspirants since everyday experience reveals that the trouble with Nigeria is not lack of resources but lack of quality and effective resource administrators. Nigeria is one of the nations endowed with enormous natural resources, good weather devoid of natural disasters; but (the quality of life of the citizens is alarmingly poor.

To forestall this unbearable socio-political and economic hardship, the selection process **MUST** be such that the personality traits of those aspiring to various positions should be assessed to discover those with development -oriented attributes.

PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT AND LEADERSHIP SELECTION

The problem of leadership in Nigeria, as a psychological problem hinges on the personality attributes of the political leaders. Their attitude to life is very important and imperative for political, economic and social development to be achieved. The screening exercise should include assessment of the aspirants', total personality attributes, intelligence, emotions, interests, aptitudes, and motives. Researchers of leadership have shown that leadership effectiveness and styles correlate positively with socio-psychological variables or personality attributes.

PERSONALITY CORRELATES OF LEADERSHIP EFFECTIVENESS

Leadership involves persuading other people to set aside for a period of time their individual concerns and to pursue a common goal that is important for the welfare of the group. It requires persuasion and domination as well as concern for building cohesive and goal-directed team (Hogan, Curphy and Hogan, 1994). To accomplish group goals, requires effective leadership and certain attributes have been linked to leadership effectiveness. Leaders have certain qualities or traits that differentiate them from non-leaders. Some of the qualities include, strong drive for responsibility and task completion, vigour and persistence in pursuance of goals, venturesomeness and originality in problem-solving; drive to exercise initiative, self-confidence and a sense of personal identity; willingness to tolerate frustration, a high sense of adaptability and dependability, high intellectual skills and a sense of aggressiveness (Stogdill, 1974). Significant positive relationship has been established between leadership effectiveness and personality attributes (Davis, 1972). McConaughy (1950) in his study involving politicians that responded to standard psychological test found that political leaders were decidedly less neurotic than the general male population, more self-sufficient, more extroverted and only slightly more domineering. The study also revealed that leaders to a large extent are more self-confident than the average person, have fewer feelings of inferiority and less irritable. Bass (1990) noted that personality traits found to be especially relevant for leadership effectiveness include: high energy stress tolerance, self-confidence, internal locus of control orientation, emotional maturity, personal integrity, socialized motivation and less need for affiliation. Bentz (1990) using Guilford Martin, Personality Inventory to assess executive found that executives promoted to the highest rank were articulated and active, independent, self-confident and emotionally balanced, hard-working and responsible. Curphy (1993) asserted that certain leaders characteristics are associated with enhanced team performance. Since personality attributes have significant positive relationship with leadership effectiveness, it becomes necessary to identify people that possess those attributes that correlate with leadership success which has implications for national development. Thus, Psychological assessment becomes an indispensable part of leadership selection process.

Psychological Assessment

Psychological assessment is the evaluation of a person's psychological status. It involves forming an opinion about the assessee's personality traits that will eventually lead to a decision on the person being assessed. It involves establishing a diagnosis for someone with mental disorder in case of clinical assessment; determining intellectual capacity of the person being assessed, predicting a person's appropriateness for a particular job or crime (Halgin and Withbourn 1993). Measures of cognitive ability and normal personality; structured interview, simulations and assessment predict leadership success reasonably well (Howard and Bray 1990; Gughes, Ginnete and Curphy 1993 and Housae, Spangler and Woycke 1991). The ultimate aim of assessment particularly in industrial/organizational sector is to fit the man to the job by assessing every aspect of the person's personality namely, aptitude, interest, personality type, dexterity, level of general intelligence, emotional intelligence level, and all the psychological endowments relevant to the job. According to Holland (1994), a match/good fit between a person's personality and occupation results in job satisfaction. By matching personality type to congruent occupation, people will bring the right interest and abilities to a job's demand and that leads to success. Ashfort and Humphrey (1995), observed that there is a significant positive relationship between emotional intelligence and leadership effectiveness. Thus, psychological assessment covers a wide range of areas including mental status examination (a procedure for assessing the person's current functioning in a variety of sphered behaviour orientation, control of thought, thinking style and language, affect, perceptual experiences, self-motivation, intelligence and insight) (Mueller, 1998); intelligence test to measure the client's potential; Achievement test to assess the person's level of past accomplishment; aptitude tests to predict future achievement in specific areas and interest tests for the person's likes and dislikes and to know whether the person will be happy or not doing the job (Quinn, 1995).

To carry out psychological assessment, psychological tests are used in addition to interview. The tests include, Objective tests (e.g. aptitude tests, Interest tests, Intelligence tests, Personality tests, and Vocational inventories,) and projective tests (such as Draw a person, house and tree tests, Incomplete sentence blank self-report inventories and Rorschach thematic apperception tests.). These tests are used to gather obtrusive information that reveals the personality attributes of the testee.

The method of assessment and type of tests to administer are determined by the purpose of assessment. Thus for leadership selection, the following personality tests could be administered:

Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory, Emotional Intelligence Tests, Strong Vocational Inventory, Memory tests, Thematic Apperception test for achievement motivation, Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Adults and other tests for affiliation and power tendencies. Result from these tests will help in screening and approval of political aspirants and eventually the emergence of effective leaders who will move the nation forward. A nation where development will be guaranteed manifests in improved standard of living, employment opportunities, hardwork, accountability, qualitative education and absence of social vices that has characterized the Nigerian nation for many decades now.

CONCLUSION

The state of affairs in the country leaves nobody in doubt as to the ineffectiveness and non-committal attitude of the leaders. The country is in a terribly bad socio-economic and psychological state because of the leadership that has piloted its affairs. If Nigerians actually desire change in their political, social, psychological and economic conditions, the leaders must be people of proven integrity, people who possess those psychological qualities or personality traits that correlate positively with effective leadership. To identify such people, psychological assessment is imperative. To carry out the assessment, psychologists must be part and parcel of the screening agency. The electoral body to ensure that objectivity cuts across the entire selection process. If this is done, we can be sure that a new course has been charted towards national development.

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