

AN X-RAY OF MORAL, PROCESS AND SUPERVISORY ACCOUNTABILITY IN NIGERIAN HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

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Abstract. Governance and management of higher education world-wide, bothers on management's and staff's acceptability of being responsible for their decisions and actions; stewardship, fairness in terms of justice and equity, and all other aspects of administrative performance. This study assessed the moral, process and supervisory accountability in Nigerian higher education. The study adopted the descriptive survey research design using purposive sampling technique. A total of 1,000 academic and administrative staff members drawn from two federal universities in the Southwestern geopolitical zone of Nigeria constituted the sample frame. Two instruments tagged "Accountability Assessment Questionnaire Types A and B" for academic and non-academic staff respectively were used to obtain needed information from the respondents. The results obtained showed agreement to all assessed variables on moral accountability except payment of allowances 77.8% as and when due. Similarly, process accountability was considered good as values above 60% was obtained in the average on documentation, review of activities and staff promotions among others; however, supervisory accountability was equally good except that reward for excellence among staff 62.9% was not in-

stitutionalized. The study therefore concluded that for staff in Nigerian higher education to be appreciated for their passion and commitment to work, payment of their allowances as and when due should be taken serious and timely. Recognition should equally be given to members of staff to serve as motivator for others. University management should not wait for staff to embark on strike actions before they are attended to as this would infringe on public perception of their moral, process and supervisory accountability.

Keywords: accountability, higher education, transformation, management, university

Introduction

Worldwide, universities are educational institutions which operate hierarchical structure under division of labour, skills specialization and evaluation patterns. In Nigeria, universities were established to solve the problems of high level of manpower demand and to enhance its rapid development as a nation before and immediately after independence. Consequently, universities began to spring up at the inspiration of political leaders in Nigeria and this gave rise to what is today called first, second, third and fourth generations of universities in Nigeria. In governance and management of tertiary education today, accountability is one of those golden concepts that no one can be against. It is increasingly being used to convey an image of transparency and trustworthiness. However, its evocative powers make it also a very elusive concept because it can mean many different things to different people.

In contemporary scholarly discourse, accountability serves as a conceptual umbrella that covers various other distinct concepts. It is used as a synonym for many loosely defined intellectual desiderata, such as transparency, equity, democracy, efficiency, responsiveness, responsibility, and integrity (Mulgan, 2000a; Behn, 2001; Dubnick, 2002). The term has come to stand as a

general term for any mechanism that makes powerful institutions responsive to their particular publics (Mulgan, 2000b). As opined by O'Connell (2005), for example, accountability is present when public services have a high quality, at a low cost and are performed in a courteous manner.

Owing hugely to the widespread public demands for transparency in governance and the global outcry against corruption, accountability becomes an issue of serious concern in many countries including Nigeria. Issue of accountability is one of the crucial issues dominating public sector management in Nigeria. It becomes important for individual who accepts position of trusts or responsibility to be accountable for his actions and inactions as it concerns his/her position. Perhaps the reason Amojori (2002) sees accountability as explanation for actions of those having custody of power, human resources, public money and other resources. It therefore deals with the justification for financial transactions as conforming to institutional rules and procedures, business concepts of morality, professional ethics and the law of state. Accountability is a process where a person or groups of people are required to present an account of their activities and the way in which they have or have not discharged their duties. By inference, a person is held accountable for not only his/her actions but also inactions. It thus entails the demonstration to someone else of success or achievement; it involves revealing, explaining and justifying what one does or has done, and how assigned responsibilities have been discharged. In the words of Laxmikanth (2006), the concept of accountability connotes the obligation of the administrators to give a satisfactory account of their performance and the manner in which they have exercised powers conferred on them. From the foregoing, it becomes a clear concept connoting being "responsible" so to say not to self alone, but to the proprietor of the institution, colleagues, other stakeholders and subordinates.

Literature review

In a broad sense, accountability is basically an evaluative, not an analytical concept. It is used to positively qualify a state of affairs or the performance of an actor. It comes close to ‘responsiveness’ and ‘a sense of responsibility’, a willingness to act in a transparent, fair, and equitable way. Accountability involves a value judgment of how judicious and effective the elements and processes in an organisation have been combined to achieve identified common goals. This implies that accountability has to do with monitoring and evaluation of how well assigned responsibilities are being executed for the achievement of predetermined goals. Accountability is a process whereby public service organisations and individuals within them are held responsible for their decisions and actions, including their stewardship, management of funds, fairness in terms of justice and equity, and all aspects of personnel and administrative performance. This is realized by developing, maintaining and making available reliable and relevant financial and non-financial information and by means of a fair disclosure of that information in timely reports to internal as well as external stakeholders. As argued by Dandago (2008), those holding positions of authority are expected to provide explanations and reasons to interested parties (the public in general) on how they have discharged the responsibilities entrusted in them.

Accountability, therefore, becomes a guiding principle in administrative decision making and job commitment. Anyone managing an organization should be responsible and ready to give periodic account of how effective and efficient the system had performed over a given period of time. Moreover, accountability is concerned with determining what records are to be kept, how such records will be maintained in terms of the procedures, methodology and forms to be used, recording classifications and summarization of activities, events, analyzing and interpreting the recorded data, preparing and issuing reports and statements which reflect conditions as of a given time.

In practice, university education is a tool for public policy, being the engine of economic growth and national competitiveness. However, owing to more and more dependency on the market or society and greater demand for performance improvement with less funding from the government, universities are increasingly accountable to state or federal government and are given more autonomy in exchange of strengthening accountability for performance or results (Amaral et al., 2003; Paradeise et al., 2009).

Accountability within the school system is the ability to answer for one's behaviours or actions to someone else who is in a position to receive such answers. There are two dimensions of accountability in the education sector.

Accountability for achieving institutional objectives

An educational system exists to achieve the diverse objectives of education. Educational objectives are sometimes not usually clearly stated. However, the management is usually accountable for the quality and clarity of the school's objectives and priorities. It is the responsibility of the school management to ensure that both short and long term goals are identified and pursued.

Accountable to superior officers

Regardless of whether the educational administrator is a headmaster, principal, provost, rector or vice-chancellor, he is an employee of the Ministry of Education and State Schools Board officials representing his employers (government and the public). The employers expect the employees to show loyalty, honesty, integrity, dedication and be highly productive. By virtue of the assigned positions and responsibilities, employees are expected by employers to be accountable to them in the following areas; the students, the staff, the community, the facilities and the finances, which have been entrusted into their care.

In the light of the above, the employees (school management) are judged by the employers on how they co-ordinate the available human and material resources for the realization of the goals of the school system optimally. Furthermore, the school management, apart from being accountable to the employers, is also accountable to parents, staff and students as critical stakeholders. However, this study focuses on the moral, process and supervisory accountability among all of its forms.

Moral accountability

Moral accountability cannot exceed moral knowledge. Conscience is absolutely essential for responsibility, character, and accountability. Moral knowledge is an unmovable precondition of moral guilt. These put together mean that anyone in position of authority and power should have and demonstrate sound knowledge of how a worker feels hence, emotion comes to play here. Demonstration of high moral values becomes an important aspect of accountability any leader must show in his or her dealings with the subordinates.

Process accountability

Process accountability demands fundamental fairness in the method by which discretionary power is exercised. It embodies the essence of fair decision making in the management and administration of the university. Process accountability generally requires adequate notice and a meaningful opportunity to be heard, but these requirements involve intertwined substantive and procedural considerations. A systemic approach to the provision of process accountability in administration ensures fair decision making and it should be noted that it is not a single event that occurs in isolation. A university should promote system-wide respect for the principles of due process by ensuring that all official inquiries into disputed facts are conducted in a predictable and dignified manner, that any members of the institutional community who face official action ad verses to their protected interests receive proper notice and a

meaningful opportunity to present and respond to evidence, and that academic and disciplinary decisions are made by unbiased officials. Compliance with the essential principles of due process in this context will reduce institutional and personal liability, and will lead to fair and just outcomes.

Supervisory accountability

The ability of a supervisor to hold their employees accountable is the single, most critical managerial skill. Supervisory skills expected of supervisors are for positive reinforcement, goal setting, delegation, conflict management, team building, communication skills, active listening, feedback, leadership, information dissemination, organisational skills, motivation techniques, and job skill development. The fact is that all of these techniques are geared to one thing – getting employees to complete work in a timely and quality manner. And when you look a little closer, you realize that the process is fairly simple and straightforward. The supervisor defines what needs to be done, delegates it to the employee and then monitors and ensures that it is done. The glue that makes this work is the overarching managerial skill every supervisor needs, the ability to hold staff accountable for the tasks that they need to do. The best managers know that the true measure of success is the assurance that staff complete task in a timely and quality manner. Before a supervisor can hold staff accountable, they must understand that there are really two measures required for a task to be successfully completed. One measure is quality; the other is timeliness.

Quality

The completion of a task or responsibility in manner that meets all standards of excellence for that task or responsibility.

Timeliness

Completing a task or responsibility on or before the stated deadline for that task or responsibility.

It is easy to see why both are essential to measuring success. Doing a great job but missing the deadline leads to failure, not success. The key to ensuring success is found in the ability of the supervisor to hold staff accountable for both the quality of the job and the time required to complete the task. The vast majority of supervisors and managers know what needs to be done for an employee to successfully complete a task or responsibility. Most supervisors are also very competent at delegating responsibilities to specific staff. The problem is that many of these same supervisors assume that delegating – the act of telling people what to do - is the measure of a good manager. It is not! Simply telling people what to do and even giving them time for when the task needs to be done is not enough. Success is measured by the employee – the person that the task was delegated to – completing the task in a quality and timely manner. The key to holding staff accountable can be found in the three steps of supervisory accountability process.

The expectation rule

You cannot hold a staff accountable unless they clearly understand all of expectations of the job or task being delegated. Whether you are delegating the full responsibilities of a job, like everything expected of a clinician in the field or you are delegating a unique responsibility, like outcomes that are expected from a meeting with a referral source, supervisors must be very clear on the two measures of success – quality and timeliness.

The skill verification rule

You cannot hold a staff accountable for skills or knowledge that they were never trained or educated on. Once the supervisor is assured that the staff knows what is expected on the job (The Expectation Rule), the supervisor is

responsible for ensuring that the staff is trained and has the knowledge and skills needed to be a success. The employee is not considered skill ready until the supervisor verifies that they have the knowledge and skills to complete job requirements in a timely and quality manner.

The accountability rule

Once the supervisor verifies that the employee knows what they are expected to do (The Expectation Rule) and they have the skills and knowledge to do the job in a timely and quality manner (The Skill Verification Rule), the supervisor can and must delegate the responsibilities and hold the staff accountable.

Once the three rules have been fulfilled, the only question that needs to be answered is, “Is the supervisor accountable enough and competent enough to use the model and hold their staff accountable?” The answer to this question will separate the effective supervisor from the ineffectual ones. The ideal nature of giving account teaches others in the same position about the accountability process.

Statement of the problem

Universities operate with people performing certain specialized and complementary roles to make the system work. Over the years, calls for accountability have become imperative because of the demand for constructive changes in the management’s sense of accountability in the moral, process and supervisory aspects. In educational institutions, particularly universities, students and staff have severally demonstrated dissatisfactions over management’s neglect of accountability as an essential ingredient in the performance of their administrative functions. This poor accountability initiative has resulted into wastage of resources such as human, fiscal and material; most resources are misallocated, misappropriated, misused, over-utilized and or under-utilized. These, put together, have created concerns to the stakeholders and

government in particular thereby causing some management members to have been confronted with enormous challenges such as students' demonstrations in which their demand was on accountability; workers strike actions as a result of non responsiveness of the management to their demands. This study therefore intends to assess management's accountability in terms of moral, process and supervision in Nigerian higher education system particularly, the university.

Research questions

The following research questions were raised to guide the study: (1) to what extent does moral accountability exist in Nigerian universities; (2) to what extent does process accountability exist in Nigerian universities; (3) to what extent does supervisory accountability exist in Nigerian Universities.

Methodology

The study adopted the descriptive survey research design using stratified and purposive sampling techniques. A total of 1000 academic and administrative staff members drawn from two federal universities in the Southwestern geopolitical zone of Nigeria constituted the sample frame. Two instruments tagged "Accountability Assessment Questionnaire (AAQ) Types A and B" for academic and non-academic staff, respectively were used to obtain needed information. The respondents were drawn from all the sections of the university which included the academics and non-academics like the bursary, registry, library, postgraduate, division of works and maintenance, halls of residence, faculties and departments. In analyzing and interpreting results of the outcome from the data collected, simple percentage was used.

Results

Research question 1:

To what extent does moral accountability exist in Nigerian higher education? To answer this question, respondents' responses were analyzed using simple percentage. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Extent of moral accountability in Nigerian higher education

S/N	Items	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)	Total (%)
1.	Exposure of staff to risk	22.2	25.9	44.4	7.4	100
2.	Imposition of decision	22.2	63.0	7.4	7.4	100
3.	High care for safety	14.8	44.4	37.0	3.7	100
4.	Staff go extra mile.	22.2	55.6	7.4	14.8	100
5.	Working based on qualification	22.2	37.0	22.2	18.5	100
6.	Discipline among staff	29.6	66.7	3.7	0	100
7.	Staff are competent	33.3	63.0	3.7	0	100
8.	Diligence in performance	37.0	63.0	0	0	100
9.	Staff are treated fairly	18.5	44.4	14.8	22.2	100
10.	Payment of allowances	7.4	14.8	22.2	55.6	100

Table 1 shows that 48.1% respondents agreed that staff are put at risk when carrying out their duties, while 51.9% disagreed. Also from this table, 85.2% respondents agreed that actions and decisions are imposed on staff while 13.8% disagreed. The table shows that 59.2% respondents agreed that there is high degree of safety for staff in discharging their duties while 40.8% disagreed. Also from the table, 77.8% respondents agreed that staff go beyond the call of duty while 22.2% disagreed. Also from the table, staff works according to their qualifications (59.2%) and 40.7% respondents disagreed. The table also shows that 96.3% of the respondents agreed that there is discipline among staff while 3.7% disagreed. Also from the table, 96.3% of the respondents agreed that staff are competent but 3.7% disagreed. Staff demonstration of

diligence in performing their duties attracted 100% agreement; and that staff are treated fairly, 62.9% of the respondents agreed while 37.1% disagreed. That allowances are paid as and when due was disagreed to by 77.8% of the respondents while 22.2% disagreed. It can then be deduced from the table that the respondents agreed to all assessed variables on moral accountability except payment of allowances as and when due by management.

Research question 2:

To what extent does process accountability exist in Nigerian higher education? To answer this question, respondents' responses were analyzed using simple percentage. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Extent of process accountability in Nigerian university

S/N	Items	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)	Total (%)
1.	There is proper documentation	37.0	63.0	0	0	100
2.	Staff show respect for constituted authority	33.3	66.7	0	0	100
3.	There is proper review of activities and duties	14.8	48.1	29.6	7.4	100
4.	There is promotion as and when due	14.8	44.4	11.1	29.6	100
5.	There is leave as at when due	29.6	40.7	14.8	14.8	100
6.	Promotion of staff is done in fairness	14.8	40.7	25.9	18.5	100
7.	Recruitment of staff is done based on merit	7.4	48.1	29.6	14.8	100

Table 2 shows that 100% of the respondents agreed that there is proper documentation of office works and that staff show respect for constituted authority. Proper review of activities and duties was agreed to by 62.9% of the respondents while 37.1% disagreed. The table also shows that 59.2% of the respondents agreed that there is promotion as and when due but 40.8% dis-

greed. Leave as and when due was agreed to by 70.3% of the respondents while 29.7% disagreed. Also from the table, 55.5% of the respondents agreed that promotion of staff is done in fairness and recruitment done based on merit while 44.5% disagreed. From the table therefore, process accountability could be considered good.

Research question 3:

To what extent does supervisory accountability exist in Nigerian higher education? To answer this question, respondents' responses were analysed using simple percentage. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Extent of supervisory accountability in Nigerian universities

S/N	Items	S.A (%)	Agree (%)	D (%)	S.D (%)	Total (%)
1.	There is flow of information	22.2	44.4	29.6	3.7	100
2.	There is a periodic report on the quality and quantity of work done	14.8	59.3	14.8	11.1	100
3.	Staff are involved in decision making process	11.1	48.1	29.6	11.1	100
4.	There is proper monitoring of activities	22.2	44.4	25.9	7.4	100
5.	There is proper appraisal on the quality of work done	14.8	63.0	14.8	7.4	100
6.	Staff is rewarded for excellent performance	11.1	25.9	48.1	14.8	100
7.	Staff is liable to punishment	29.6	44.4	18.5	7.4	100

Table 3 shows that 66.6% of the respondents agreed that there is flow of information when 33.4% disagreed. Also from the table, there is periodic report on the quality and quantity of work done (74.1%) while 25.9% disagreed. Equally, 66.6% of the respondents agreed to proper monitoring of activities and 77.8% agreed to proper appraisal on the quality and quantity of works done while 33.4% and 22.2% respectively disagreed. Staff is liable to punishment for wrong doings (74%) while 26% disagreed. However, the Table shows

that staff reward for excellence is bad hence 62.9% disagreed while 37.1 agreed.

Discussion

The result of findings to research question one revealed the existence of moral accountability in Nigerian higher education. The results indicated that moral accountability on the part of staff (administrative and academics) is very high. This is evident from the findings as presented in Table 1 which showed high percentage for extra work, working according to qualification, and high discipline among staff, competency and diligence in performance. This corroborate the position of O'Connell (2005), who said moral accountability refers to the duty to render account of work performed to a body that has authority to modify the performance by the use of sanctions or reward. Similarly, on moral issue, Amaral et al. (2003) posits that to say there is moral accountability is to admit that there are eternal consequences for our actions and thereby performing conscientiously every assignment that may be given by one's employer. Corroborating the findings too is Dubnick (2002), who observed that every worker should hold his office in higher regards. However, moral accountability is low on the part of management; as reflected in Table 1, actions and decisions were imposed on workers without consultation and due consideration of the implications of such for their existence. To worsen the situation, payment of allowances was not always done as and when due until they had to embark on demonstrations using any available means as may be considered appropriate to deal with the management. These findings corroborate the essence of accountability as opined by Mulgan (2000), Behn (2001), Dubnick (2002), Amojori (2002) and O'Connell (2005), that it is an explanation of whoever is put in the position of trusts and power, responsibilities, human resources, public monies and other resources to give account for his actions and inactions considering the morality, professional ethics and laws of the state.

The result of findings to research question two showed that process accountability exists in Nigerian higher education. This result indicates that there are proper documentation and review of activities, fairness in promotion, recruitment and leave for the staff as and when due. Lending credence to these findings is Laxmikanth (2006), who posits that process accountability gives emphasis to the procedures and methods of operations by which assignments or objectives are carried out. He explained further that process accountability is very adaptable to democratic and pluralistic settings because it is the product of mutually determined objectives and a process arrived at after a compromise. Those responsible for providing the service are expected to perform according to agreed – upon terms and with stipulated use of resources based on specific performance standards. Process accountability demands fundamental fairness in the method by which discretionary power is exercised. This finding corroborates that of Dandago (2008). It embodies the essence of fair decision making in the management and administration of the university. Process accountability generally requires adequate notice and a meaningful opportunity to be heard, but these requirements involve intertwined substantive and procedural considerations. A systemic approach to the provision of process accountability in administration ensures fair decision making and it should be noted that it is not a single event that occurs in isolation

The findings of research question three revealed the existence of supervisory accountability in Nigerian higher education. Results showed that supervisory accountability exists at a very high extent. Results indicate that there is proper monitoring, appraisal of work, flow of information, periodic report, and punishment where need be; the essence of which is to ensure that those given roles, tasks and responsibilities are accountable for delivery of the business for which they are responsible. This corroborates the position of Subair (2000), who said that supervisory accountability is the ability of a supervisor to hold his/her employees accountable is the single, most critical managerial skill. Supervisory management skills expected of supervisors are for positive

reinforcement, goal setting, delegation, conflict management, team building, communication skills, active listening, feedback, leadership, information dissemination, organizational skills, motivation techniques, and job skill development. The fact is that all of these techniques are geared to one thing – getting employees to complete work in a timely and quality manner. Lending support to the above position is Paradeise et al. (2009), who said supervisory accountability is concerned with the responsibility of managers for health and safety, and other legal duties towards those either directly or indirectly under their charge and towards those who may be affected by their acts or omissions. It also set out the good principles of relevant legislation, and provides information on where more specific guidance can be found.

Conclusion

Based on the findings and results of the analyses, it is concluded that the staff of Nigerian higher education observed non-payment of allowances as and when due as the major shortcoming of the managements; and reward for excellent performance. However, staff still shows respect for constituted authority, attend to their duties even with passion regularly and punctually. More importantly, managements of Nigerian higher education could do better when it comes to moral, process and supervisory accountability as demonstrations of responsibility on their parts.

Recommendations

Considering the findings of the study, it becomes obvious that the management of Nigerian higher education and the staff of the institutions are inseparable and co-existed in achieving positive result in the university. Hence, the following recommendations are suggested:

- (i) The management of Nigerian higher education should ensure prompt payment of allowances as it relates to staff welfare to ensure relatively submission to work.
- (ii) The management and staff of Nigerian higher education should work hand-in-hand for co-existence in order to achieve meaningful progress in the institutions.
- (iii) The management of Nigerian higher education should encourage and reward excellent performance as a way of motivating staff and to increase their commitment.
- (iv) The management should encourage joint decision making process as a better means of eliciting staff's support.
- (v) The management should give adequate attention to both academic and non academic staff welfare and that of the students too.

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