BEST PRACTICES IN EXTENSION ADMINISTRATION AND MANAGEMENT: A DISCUSS.

Altine Justine Madugu
Adamawa State University, Mubi, Adamawa State, Nigeria.
Ph.D Scholar, University of Maiduguri, Borno State, Nigeria.

ABSTRACT

The first of a two-part series addressing extension administration and management, this discusses/commentary challenges traditional extension administrative practice arguing that a particular method does not make a benchmark in the modern work place. The innovation systems approach is defined, how it relates to extension administration/management is examined. Management challenges and the implication of such practices to extension work are also examined with a conclusion that the extension manager/administrator should be an active innovator in order to respond faster, compete efficiently and continually adapt to changing environment.

Keywords: Best practices, Extension, Management, Administration

1. INTRODUCTION

A lot of extension organizations (especially in developing countries) have begun questioning their age long mission of improving the quality and standard of living of (particularly rural) people. With the broad scope and limited resources, extension organizations found themselves not delivering to the many expectations. Governments and funding agencies are also asking questions about level of spending and impact of public sector organizations (Dustan, 1999).

The aim of any organization is to efficiently utilize resources to achieve the major objective of the organization. The resources employed could be human and material, these have to be combined to function smoothly for the organization to progress and deliver, therefore, management has to create and maintain a conducive environment in which individual employees should work together in group towards the accomplishment of common organizational goals (Ogunbameru, 2001).

It is in quest of the need for greater efficiency, productivity, standards and performances that most organizations of whatever nature adopt common practices or principles. The practices have been perhaps found to lead to the general success of most organizations, whether national or international, private or public. They also cut across various sectors of the economy such as manufacturing, transport, agriculture and so on. More especially in the age of information and communication technology ICT, where everyone could easily access information to enhance its operations, that explains why practices that are known to achieve relative progress elsewhere have been adopted rapidly in other places and could be termed as best practices in

administration/ management. However, most administrators know what needs to be done but struggle with how to do it, quite often, they prefer to consider themselves as teachers or communicators rather than managers, and this results in underutilization of best management theories and practices (Waldron *et al,* 2011). This paper discusses best practices in extension administration and management. Specifically, the paper addressed the following

i- Best practices in administration/management of extension organizations.
ii- Innovation systems approach to extension administration/management.
iii- Management challenges.
iv- Implication of such administrative practices to extension work.
v- Conclusion.

The paper is in two parts, part one covers best practices in administration and management of extension organizations while part two shall discuss innovation systems approach to extension administration, management challenges and implication of such practices to extension work.

Best Practices

A best practice is used to describe a process of developing and following a standard way of doing things that multiple organizations can use worldwide. It is simply a method or technique that has consistently shown results superior to those achieved with other means and that is used as a benchmark. It is a feature of accredited administrative standards such as the ISO (encyclopedia, 2011). A best practice can evolve to become better as improvements are discovered. A strategic requirement when applying best practice to an organization is the ability to balance the unique qualities of an organization with the practices that it has in common with others.

A practice is a process of doing things; it is a group of related activities that contribute to one large action generally referred to as a function or management. Best administrative function or management according to Waldron, (1994) are based on a common philosophy and approach, they center on the following:

- Developing and clarifying missions, policies and objectives of the organizations.
- Establishing formal and informal organizational structures as a means of delegating authority and sharing responsibilities.
- Setting priorities, reviewing and revising objectives in terms of changing demands.
- Maintaining effective communication within the working group, with other groups and with the larger community.
- Selecting, motivating, training and appraising staff alongside securing funds, managing budgets and evaluating accomplishments.
- Being accountable to staff, the larger enterprise and to the community at large.

There are five administrative functions namely; planning, organizing, human resource, leading and controlling. In recent times, these practices have been improved upon and

categorized with an acronym POSDCORB (Bonama and Slevin, 1978 from Waldron *et al*, 2011). The acronym connotes planning, organizing, staffing, directing, coordinating and budgeting.

(a) Planning:

This is the key management function to a change agent. It is a process of determining in advance what should be accomplished, when, by whom, how and at what cost. It is a process of determining the organizational goals and objectives whether it is for long or a short time period. It is designing the future, anticipating problems and imagining success, this involves choosing a course of action from available alternatives. It helps to make the best use of available resources by initiating activities required to transform plans into action and evaluating the outcome. The four types of planning are: strategic, tactical, contingency and managerial planning (Marshall, 1992).

(b) Organizing:

This is establishing formal relationships among people and resources in order to reach specific goals and objectives. In organizing, administrators must choose an appropriate structure. Organizational structure is primarily represented by a chart which specifies who is to do what and how it will be done. This must continuously be adjusted to suit a country's/organization's needs and resources (Madukwe, 2005).

Principles of organizing:

- Unity of command (who is answerable to whom?).
- Span of control (what unit or department is under ones control?).
- Delegation of authority (how to share responsibilities).
- Homogenous assignment.
- Flexibility.

Process of organizing:

This involves five steps;

- Determining the tasks to be accomplished.
- Subdividing major tasks into individual activities.
- Assigning specific activities to individuals.
- Providing necessary resources.
- Designing the organizational relationships needed.

Aspects of organizing:

They include time, structure, chain of command, degree of concentration and role specification (Marshall, 1992).

(c) Staffing:
Simply, this is to find the right people for the right jobs. Appropriate human resource planning is related to the success of the extension administrator regardless of whether it is the hiring of a secretary or an instructor for a particular workshop.

Staff selection:

This involves evaluating candidates through application forms, curriculum vitae, interviewing and choosing the best candidate for the specific job responsibility. A list of criteria and score sheet can be kept for each candidate; even then, successful hiring is often a difficult task and involves some degree of risk (Onu, 2005).

Guidelines for job interviews:

Job interviews should be characterized by;

- A clear definition of purpose for the interview.
- The presence of structure or general plan.
- The use of interaction as a learning experience in a pleasant and stimulating atmosphere.
- Creation and maintenance of rapport between interviewer and interviewee.
- Establishment of mutual confidence and respect for interviewee's interest and individuality by the interviewer.
- Establishment and maintenance of good communication with an effort to put the interviewee at ease.
- Willingness to treat what is being said in proper perspective.
- The just treatment of each interviewee (Dark, 1973 from Waldron *et al,* 2011; Davis, 2014).

Staff orientation:

It is the formal introduction of the selected individual to the particular unit, to colleagues and to the organization. Such a person should particularly be aware of the mission and objectives of the unit, nature of responsibilities, level of authority, degree of accountability, system and procedures followed to accomplish the tasks associated with the job. A motivated individual will ask for things like personnel manual, administrative procedures, handbooks, aims and objective statements. Such orientation tools should be made available.

(d) Directing:
This signifies leading and leadership styles. Leadership here means a process where the work environment is created in which people can give their best work and be interested in producing a quality product or service.

Theory X and Y of McGregor (1960) are being used by administrators. Theory X relates to traditional management system where managers control, coerce and threaten employees to motivate them while theory Y is the opposite. Here, employees want to do challenging jobs, they are interested in taking responsibilities, basically creative and want to be involved in policy development and objective setting. Today, these theories are not very revolutionary i.e. management styles and employee motivation do not easily fit into two theoretical labels, thus a new theory must be developed (Patterson, 1997).

(e) Coordinating:

This consists of interconnecting various parts of the work i.e. connecting the various job roles and responsibilities of the administrator and other staff of one unit with other units within the organization. Coordination occurs in two ways: vertical and horizontal. Vertical involves reporting to your supervisor

And staff while horizontal involves reporting to your colleagues and management team.

Coordinating role should be given priority because extension educators are involved in very complex organizations such as government agencies, universities, colleges and boards. The size of such organizations, increasing demand for public accountability, many regulations and policies, completion among providers of adult education and changes in technology all makes the job more complex, hence the need for prioritizing it.

Guidelines for effective coordination:

- It requires professional and competent leadership, a democratic style.
- A constant definition of mission and objectives that are understood by all managers.
- An open two way channels of communication.

(f) Reporting:

This closely relates to coordinating. It consists of keeping those to whom the administrator is responsible informed of what is going on. This is more than preparing annual report. Quoting statistics and informing the staff of current developments, rather, it is almost an evaluation since it compares how the organization is doing with what it sets out to do. It reviews the objectives and determines to what extent it is being met, it relates program direction, policy changes, refinement in objectives, changes in structure and priorities.

(g) Budgeting:

This function includes fiscal planning, accounting, revenue and expense controls. Others include an understanding of realities, economic conditions and a haunch for predicting the unpredictable. A budget is a financial guide that is constantly being changed; it is a continual process of regular review and possible revision. This is called budget management, it consists of three parts:

- Budget determination (allocating revenue according to priorities and by line items).
- Budget accountability i.e. how well the anticipated budget matches reality(Bergeson, 2008; Waldron, 1994).

Most of these are functions that have been carried out by generations of administrative predecessors which focus on managing subordinates. Thus the overriding activity of extension administration is simply to manage. Based on this, which approach is best for administrators to adopt in present times? Top-bottom or bottom-top approach? The second part of this series will attempt to show the way forward.

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