

COUNSELLING AS A REMEDY FOR CORRUPTION IN THE NIGERIAN CIVIL SERVICE

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ABSTRACT

Corruption has taken roots in the Nigerian society as a result of moral decadence. Public officials in Nigeria have deviated from accepted norms to satisfy their private needs. This paper defines what corruption is, its causes and effects and how counselling can be used as an effective tool in eradicating corruption in the Nigerian civil service. It is recommended that a national office for nationhood counselling should be established. A committee of counselors and other experts in the behavioural fields should also be established. This overall and all-embracing philosophy and ideology for the nation is aimed at inculcating into the people our good culture of moral values and the idea of nationalism and patriotism.

INTRODUCTION

Corruption is one of the serious problems in Nigeria today. The nature, forms and magnitude of corruption in Nigerian civil service and private sectors cannot be overemphasized. Corruption has always been the major reason given for all the past military coups in Nigeria. Almost everyone seems to be infested by this social problem (Nye, 1978). Corruption has proven to be a national pest in the lives of Nigerians. Various probe panels and government white papers on past corrupt activities are testimonies of the pervasiveness of this social ill (Thompson, 1994). Even with the establishment of the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC), corruption still prevail in public offices.

Having seen the dimension of corruption in the lives of Nigerians, it is now believed in strong terms, that counselling will be an important tool for behavioural change. It is one of the ways that can be used to remedy corruption in the Nigerian society.

Conceptual Definition

Huntington (1968) defined corruption as a “behaviour of public officials which deviates from accepted norms in order to serve private ends”. Kuper and Kuper (1996:142) sees corruption in its most general sense to mean “the perversion or abandonment of a standard”. Nye (1978:233) sees corruption as “behaviour which deviates from the formal duties of public rules regarding pecuniary or status gain, or violates rules against the exercise of certain types of private – regarding influence”. Gyong (2001:5) defines corruption to mean “the perversion of integrity or state of affairs through bribery, favour, or moral depravity”. It can also be seen as a case where at least two parties have interacted to change the structure or processes of society or the behaviour of functionaries in order to produce dishonest, unfaithful or defiled situation.

Corruption includes any form of crime that involves the violation of existing laws or norms. Corruption therefore takes place when people try to get what they do not deserve by using money, tribal and ethnic connections, religion, family name, threats, harassments and other bad influences. In other words it is illegal to use the above variables to achieve selfish interests.

Types of Corruption in the Nigerian Civil Service

According to Tompson (1994:20), people violate the laws of the society in Nigeria. Businessmen engage in illegal foreign exchange deals. They infringe on patent rights, circumvent custom laws, and under-declare profits. Employers violate labour laws and contracts while politicians and military officials, inflate contracts to siphon money to their parties and personal pockets. They receive commissions or kickbacks. They embezzle public money in their trust. Doctors give false testimonies in accident cases (Thompson 1994:24). Other manifestations of corruption in Nigerian society can be seen in government officials swindling government money and securing perjured testimonies from witnesses to tilt the scale of justice, judges jailing innocently accused persons brought to their courts to get higher posts; journalists collecting brown envelopes to write complimentary stories and policemen collecting bribes from criminals and motorists. (Gyong, 2001:12)

Causes of Corruption in Nigerian Civil Services

People believe that nothing can be done to stop corruption in the Nigerian society. They believe that Nigerians are naturally corrupt. This is because the rate of

corruption in Nigeria is alarming; yet there are still a number of Nigerians who live honourable lives. So it is a wrong impression to subscribe to the view that corruption is an integral part of our society. This widespread belief could be detrimental since everyone will want to allude to corruption as a common practice and wish to do so as others are doing. It may also serve as a psychological respite for the reduction of the dissonance that may accompany the intention of the officer to engage in corrupt practice (Thompson, 1994:24).

One major cause of corruption in Nigeria is pervasive poverty. According to Adamu (2003:37), poverty can drive officials to receive gratification from people in order "to make ends meet". The poor economic state of the nation is another strong factor which has helped to enhance and entrench corruption in the country. For a long time, the economy has been biting hard on everybody. Under such poor economic situation, evil desires reign supreme and legality is dishonoured. Being forced by poverty to disregard moral values, officers collaborate with people so as to make more money to enable them solve their family financial problems.

Another cause of corruption in Nigeria is the change in values and aspirations of people. In the earlier days, everyone was his brother's keeper. People respected hard work and there was dignity in labour. People worked hard to earn their living. In the traditional African society, people are respected not for their wealth but for their wisdom and old age. All these died with the coming of the colonial master.

The oil boom in the late 1960s to early 1970s, brought huge amounts of revenue which became available for unscrupulous individuals to appropriate (Madunagu, 1984:24). People's attitudes changed. Ill-gotten wealth and corruption became applauded. Corruption thus became "legalized". People became frustrated and frantic efforts have to be made to satisfy the society in expectation.

Current practice where government officers are given elaborate accommodation, furnishings, official cars to mention a few encouraged corruption as this empowered these officers to live in sumptuously furnished apartments throughout their service years. Thus, creating good taste in them which they like to maintain upon retirement. Meanwhile, their salary is not enough. Therefore they have to embezzle public money to sustain their taste.

This type of government as we see, have also helped to compound the problem of corruption further as those who will like to be honest can no longer afford to do so. They, therefore, try to help themselves to alleviate their sufferings through corrupt

practices (Thompson, 1994:25). It is the same in the present system of government. Some political leaders and other civil servants are still involved in these corrupt practices. The cases of former Inspector General of the Nigerian Police Mr. Tafa Balogun, Governor Alameshiah of Bayelsa State and Governor Dariye of Plateau State are good examples.

Corruption is also the product of the Nigerian society. Our society nurtures corrupt people and turns them into celebrities. This is a reflection of the moral decadence of our country. In Nigeria today, we have all forms of corrupt officers who are glorified by the grace of their ill-gotten wealth (Adamu, 2002:37). Lastly, psychologists believe that behaviours which are deviant or conformist are purposive and goal directed. To Okun (1982:10) "people" are continuously striving towards meeting their own needs, ranging from basic psychological, sociological and aesthetic needs". Kolo (1994:36) for example draws from the field theory of Kurt Lewin, who emphasizes that behaviour of any organism is a function of the field in which they exist at the time the behaviour occurs. Applying this theory to corruption in Nigeria, it means that corrupt behaviours are exhibited when there is a conducive environment for it to thrive. For the behaviour to occur in such environment, there could be objects or events that are positively or negatively valent that are preponderant to the goals which these organisms seeks to satisfy. A corrupt behaviour, therefore can only be motivated by forces which these goals exert upon the organisms (Kolo, 1994:36).

Effects of Corruption:

The following are the effects of corruption in Nigerian civil service:

1. Corrupt practices reduce the chances of rapid development as the funds meant for developmental projects would be diverted (Kolo, 1994: 36).
2. It has a devastating effect on the economy.
3. Corruption is a source of more hardship, impoverishment and delayed human development.
4. It has led to the collapse of many commercial banks.
5. Corruption has contributed to a regime of abandoned projects in Nigeria and it has established both the economic and social well being of local government, state and federal government officials.
6. It can lead to total collapse of the government, anarchy and revolution in the country.
7. Corruption reduces the level of public ethics and accountability thereby reducing the level of people's trust in government (Ortese, 2003: 6).

8. It also prevents the government from achieving their stated aims and objectives (Kolo, 1994: 40).

Counselling As A Tool to Remedy Corruption in the Nigerian Civil Service

The Federal Government in Nigeria has tried its best to eradicate corruption in the Nigerian civil service, but national and international reports still indicate that there is a lot more to be done in order to reduce or eradicate corrupt practices in Nigeria. Counselling still remains an effective tool for tackling the problem of corruption in the Nigerian society through behavioural change.

Theobald (1991: 25) agrees that the attitude of Nigerians towards corruption must be changed. For corrupt practices to be minimized to the barest level, there must be a change in the attitude and personality of individuals. Counselling psychologists, and social workers as it is, have the basic skills, knowledge and principles of human behaviour which can help to build the required trust in government and also assist in the systematic change in behaviour and attitude of Nigerians.

With the help of a school counselor, students can be assisted in decision making and competence, to respect the worth and dignity of individuals. They should be guided to respect human right and labour laws and also to improve job satisfaction and personalities (Thompson, 1994: 23). Counsellors are in a better position to work hard towards the reduction of behavioural problems because they have the skills and techniques to enhance the identification of these bad behaviours and enhance their coping mechanisms. The counselors should guide students towards self-evaluation, self-understanding, self-esteem, self-direction, and thus develop healthy habits, good behaviours, desirable attitudes and self fulfillment.

According to Thompson (1994: 25) "with counselling, a person at work will only be committed to change his attitude and behaviour only if he has personal thought over his bad behaviour and has reached a decision to change. "Counselling enables the individual to reach the process of internalization resulting in the client becoming determined to carry out the changes by himself which he has decided earlier on. All these could happen through the school counselor, the community counselor, pastoral counselor, and the counselors that are in other non-school settings.

In most cases, social learning theory, aversive technique, and cognitive restructuring could be effective in treating corruption in the following ways:

Social Learning Theory

Social learning theory is defined by Blackham and Silberman (1980) as an individual contacts, interacts with his environment to reach the ultimate goal of self-knowledge, self-satisfaction, self-support and self-fulfillment. Bandura (1971) outlined characteristics of social learning as:

- a. "Most behaviour repertoires are learned". Behaviours are learned and they can be unlearned. This is to say that since corrupt practices are learned, they can be unlearned. Thus they can be pushed by environmental factors.
- b. "The process of social learning involves modelling, imitating the behaviour of significant others, such as parents, friends, siblings, to mention a few". Counselors can therefore use models that will change behaviour positively. The need for the counselors to reach out to members of civil service and the society to be good models is therefore important as this will help us when we are interacting with one another to emulating good behaviour consciously or unconsciously.
- c. The counselor needs to bring out various ideas on how to reinforce positive attitudes of good civil servants in order to motivate them as the effect of negative or positive reinforcement is a strong element for behavioural display by individuals. The corrupt behaviour should be discouraged. Culprits should also be rewarded in various ways particularly in the area of promotion, dismissal, taking away their properties in order to recover what they have taken. The administration should cooperate with the counselor to carry these effectively.
- d. "An individual influences his environment and the environment influences him". The implication here is that our societal value standards like hard work, good name, positive behaviour, all serve as a conducive environment that will influence an individual positively as this will enable the individual influence his environment positively.

This theory gives an individual a better understanding of his environment and himself and the way he thinks and how others perceive him. It will also assist him to be aware of himself and the roles he is to play in the society.

Aversive Technique

This technique involves the creation of conditions that would make people behave the way they should. The aversive technique can be used in treating different behavioural disorders like corruption. These are:

1. **Covert Sensitization:** This is pairing unpleasant scenes, imaginably with unacceptable behaviour, for example a corrupt officer may be asked to imagine an actual consequence of guilt, negative reactions from parents, friends, colleagues and the society for his undesirable behaviour.
2. **Positive Practice:** This requires a repeated practice of a relevant behaviour when the inappropriate behaviour does not change.
3. **Response Cost:** This is a form of punishment in which a reinforcer is removed after an inappropriate or undesirable behaviour. The counselor can inform the client (corrupt officer) about the rewards. This usually involves penalty in form of fine, loss of position, posts, privileges, promotion, stagnation, or dismissal from the civil service.

Cognitive Restructuring

Ellis and Writeley (1979) describe theoretical constructs under the practice of Rational Emotive Therapy, "which states that human problems are the result of faulty thinking or irrational beliefs". For this, individual's cognitive system can be changed. The use of cognitive restructuring is to achieve the desired goal. In this theory, people are assisted to critically evaluate their behaviour by focusing on negative self statement. It also focuses on directing individuals to identify the stylistic qualities that involve distortions of inappropriate behaviour in their thinking process.

In terms of corruption, this technique involves a lot of teaching the corrupt officer to see the irrationality or illogicality of his or her thoughts and bad behaviour. The negative self statement the corrupt officer had been used to, has to be changed to a more positive self statements and self change.

According to Kolo (1994: 38) "to modify an individual's life in order to eliminate his corrupt behaviour, demands the use of force". Since corruption is an entrenched behaviour in Nigeria today, the concept of force has to be applied minimally in order to reduce the rate. The use of force in counselling is used in the rational theories of counselling when force is used as a basic technique. Therefore, counsellors must bear

in mind that the use of force to conform may be necessary. Therefore various counselling strategies could be used to eradicate corruption among Nigerian civil servants.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are therefore made in order to get rid of corruption in the Nigerian civil service:

- a. No person shall offer a public officer any property, gift or benefit of any kind as an inducement or bribe for the granting of any favour.
- b. Government should uplift the living standard of its citizens. Officers should be motivated. This will reduce or eradicate corruption in the civil service.
- c. The government should frown at public officers who engage in abuse of their offices. This is unlawful or contrary to any government policy (Amadi *et al.*, 1999: 63).
- d. The Federal Government should make it mandatory for guidance and counselling services to be introduced in all public offices.
- e. The government should establish a policy statement on the roles of counselors in the national political and economic matters. Also pastoral counselling should be encouraged among civil servants (Thompson 1994: 26).
- f. A national office for nationhood counselling should be established. A committee of counselors and other experts in the behavioural fields should also be established. This overall and all-embracing philosophy and ideology for the nation is aimed at inculcating into the people our good culture of moral values and the idea of nationalism and patriotism.

Conclusion

The fight against corruption cannot be won except government employ counsellors both in school and non-school settings in order to assist corrupt officers take decisions that will change their undesirable behaviours. The government should also improve the welfare of civil servants and culprits should be severely punished for their offence.

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