

Research Article

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When management and political business diverge: Surface eccentricity and the conceptual linkages

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Abstract: The general objective of this article is to locate a nexus between management and political business. An apparent eccentricity is noticeable in the placement of the research variables. The paper studies this scenario as surface eccentricity and attempts to provide the conceptual linkages. Political business is positioned in the paper as the important matters and affairs of civil administration or government which actually diverges from

the notions of profit and loss accounts, tardy receivables and diminishing stock holdings usually associated with business and business management. The theme of inseparability of management theory and practice is further deeply explored in the article. In contextualizing this notion of inseparableness and then locating an empirical trajectory for the embedded analyses, the study became located within the setting of a specific political economy and the nation-state of Nigeria. The thesis of the paper is that management theory and practice are obligatory in the purposeful and effective political business, which borders on consummate decision-making.

Keywords – Management, Political business, Politics, Strategic management, Universality of management

1. INTRODUCTION

Management is an exceedingly pervasive phenomenon. This declaration is easily distinguishable from the typical disputations bordering on the universality or otherwise of management and “the generalizability of management concepts and theories” (Koontz et al., 1980; Amankwah-Amoah, 2016; Dumi et al. 2012). The pervasiveness of management essentially stems from the understanding that from the personal, domestic, organizational and interorganizational, national, and international levels, the acts of handling or controlling something successfully are undeviatingly undertaken (Lumineau & Oliveira, 2018; Langfred, 2000). It is akin to seeing management as an amalgam of the six major groups of the main schools of management in the classificatory scheme (Koontz, 1961). Fundamentally under this classification, the various approaches to management theory are easily locatable in one



of the following clusters, even if all the nuances of each approach are not exhaustively covered: the decision theory school, the empirical school, the management as process school, the social system school, the human behaviour school, the mathematical school and the decision theory school (Koontz, 1961). The fusion of these approaches gives to management the ubiquity pigmentation.

This position is however conceptually divergent from the comparative management theory angles which Redding (1994) wondered if they were comparable to a jungle, zoo or fossil bed. Preceding Redding (1994) and Koontz (1961) similarly contributed his immensely influential piece entitled "The Management Theory Jungle". Sometimes too, the political business begins to be similar to jungle-like affairs, not necessarily conducted in zoological gardens but apparently in locations now turned into figurative fossil beds by political bosses. Invariably, comparative management comes back tangentially into the paper's considerations. But essentially, the paper is about the apparent linkages or otherwise between management and the political business (political business shall presently be conceptualized in the work). The embedded study-variables may currently sound eccentric, pending further elucidations. Then a general objective of the contribution is to engage in the conceptual and theoretical reconciliation of the ostensible divergences and determine how surface eccentricity may yield conceptual linkages. Attempting to create an empirical trajectory for the study's analyses, the work became purposively located within the setting of a specific political economy and the nation state of Nigeria. It is consequently hypothesized that in this case study location there are divergences between management and political business.

Building a theoretical grounding for the article further requires the introduction of the subsection following this introduction, captioned theorizing management. The paper has already alluded to the next section subtitled, conceptualizing political business. Furthermore in creating the structure of the presentation, there is the segment designated the imperatives of empiricism. In this seven-section schema of analysis, what follows at the fifth position is the core exploration on management-political business divorce. The sixth subdivision of the paper treats the consequences of an empirical separation of an otherwise worthwhile management-political business scenario. The last slice of the discourse provides a summation.

2. THEORIZING MANAGEMENT

The primacy of theory in the potency of management research and practice is being intensely disputed (Van Maanen, 1989; Adler et al., 2007; Joullié & Gould, 2021). But even the decriers of the surviving management theory and its efficacy, acknowledge that "theory legitimates management research and through the application of theory management practice is legitimated as professional preoccupation (Joullié & Gould, 2021, p. 1). Such theory-opposing scholars still admit that for decades a focal point of management research was theory production but argue that theory codifies predictive knowledge, necessitating and runs in a strawman argument of human existence, the type that fails to make room for choice and responsibility, thereby leading to weaknesses in management theory and elucidates its insufficient utility" (Joullié & Gould, 2021: 1). On the reverse side of these apparently rich anti-theory claims is still the viewpoint of the formidable role of theory in providing grounding for management research and procedures. And in any case, the existence of extensive divergence between managerial practice and organizational research is hardly a new position (Rynes et al., 2001; Kieser et al, 2015; Molina-Azorín et al, 2020). This segment of the current contribution accordingly inclines towards the perspective of the influential position of theory in management study and tradition.

In the supervening polemics, "management is simultaneously a target of celebration and complaint, of denigration and recurrent demands for better organizational functioning, as many hail management as a 'holy grail' that will deliver well-functioning institutions and uninterrupted wealth creation. Yet, management is also charged with serial failures with respect to ethics, self-aggrandizement, recklessness and poor husbandry" (Alvesson & Willmott, 2012: 1). In the ensuing discourses, "the popular remedy is more management, often of much the same kind but, of course 'better'. The paradox then reflects a drug-like dependence on 'management',



whereby we expect it to be effective, complain when it fails and repeatedly demand an increase in the dose to restore our confidence" (Alvesson & Willmott, 2012: 1). Invariably, the dialectics of theory and practice in management research and empirical representations cannot be easily wished away. For instance, until recently nearly everyone who have made an attempt to study the management process and seek theoretical foundations for improving practice, teaching and research, were perceptive and alert practitioners of the art who pondered on several years of experience (Koontz, 1961: 174). A number of scholars are accordingly persuaded that the discipline of management reclines on two major planks of theory and practice (Lawal, 2011; Olarewaju & George, 2014).

Focusing on general management, Koontz (1961: 174) further adds that as an intellectually-based art, the aboriginal significant contributions emanated from experienced practitioners such as Fayol, Barnard, Urwick Sheldon, Alvin Brown Mooney, and invariably not even the most academic exponent of empirical research can ignore the empiricism entailed in garnering the basics from decades of involvement by such perceptive practitioners. The present intervention subscribes to the notion of the germaneness of management theory as foundation of practice or the plausibility of a dialectics in management theory and practice. It sees theory as a premise not a restriction and within the world of these premises there are still variants and trajectories that attach responsibility to choice of explanatory schemes and courses of practical managerial action.

3. CONCEPTUALIZING POLITICAL BUSINESS

If there were a single word only, with interminably irreconcilable conceptual and lexical connotations, it should be politics (Wæver, 2011; Tansey et al, 2014; Brown, 2015; Van der Eijk, 2018; Cozzaglio, 2020). Business also possesses its own share of conceptual inexactitudes. Politics and business are accordingly, even ostensibly self-contradictory. The former seemingly elicits memories that must be elided by dedicated managers. Business on the other hand possibly also invokes recollections about estranged partners in arbitration or sundry servicers and suppliers, chasing their payment coupons, anxious about overdue receivables and depleting inventory. Then sooner or later, business theorization boils down to the issue of business strategies, referring to some proactive moves and actions that assist a firm to achieve and sustain competitive advantages within a given industry (Varadarajan & Clark, 1994 in Sun et al., 2021: 3). But business is also imbued with other connotations. It can imply important matters and affairs (it may even mean unspecified activities).

Still attempting to disambiguate political business as a key variable of this presentation, the attention turns to the adjectival expression of 'political', undeniably coming from politics. Further elucidations are still made on the meaning of politics or the germane denotation of the term in the section of the paper treating "The Management-Political Business Divorce". In the interim, the political is "concerned with government, relating to civil administration or government". Political business in the paper thus indicates the important matters and affairs of civil administration or government which begins to diverge from the notions of profit and loss accounts, tardy receivables and diminishing stock holding. It begins to imply the important matters and affairs of the state as handled by state actors – important state matters – "those interactions through which values are allocated authoritatively for a society" (Easton, 1965, as cited in Van der Eijk, 2018: 15). The paper's principal research design is qualitative. The contribution's methodology further entails secondary data analysis and logical argumentation.

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1. The imperatives empiricism

Management is not a concave concept, probably made barer by the embedded contentious theorizations. Management is undertaken under institutional or corporeal settings. It entails a combination of theory and empiricisms, giving rise to the trajectory of management practice which is locatable in firms and manifold organizations. Management practice is also conducted under the generic categorization of the public sector, the home front of politics. The provision of an empirical platform for the paper becomes imperative in order to give it



a concrete grounding. The Nigerian state is therefore judgmentally chosen as the experiential podium of the contribution. The nation called Nigeria is in West Africa. It is a country of immense diversities with an estimated population in excess of 211 million (Worldometer, 2021). The Nigerian economy is a mixed economy. The Investopedia (2020) describes this economic system as the type that safeguards private property and permits certain levels of economic choice in the capital usage, but equally providing for government's interference in economic matters so as to attain social objectives. The Investopedia (2020) further highlights that mixed economy models are less efficient than their pure free markets counterparts, but the advocates of government interventionism believe that the fundamental conditions necessary for efficiency in free market models, such as rational market participants and equal information are not achievable in empirical application. The admixture of economic liberty in capital usage and state interference in economic engagements precipitates challenges for robust managerial practices.

4.2. The management-political business divorce

The notion of a nexus between management and political business seems eccentric but such a reading can also be labeled surface eccentricity. But what is politics? Citing Bentley et al. (1995) and Modebadze (2010: 41) asserts that conflicts which arise out of the holding of different viewpoints is at the center of politics as politics is the study of conflict resolution. Even if the placement of 'study' in this conceptualization is considered restrictive and unnecessarily theoretical in this contribution, the remainder of the articulation is perceived as relevant because politics deals with the reconciliation of different views and conflict resolution. Modebadze (2010) had earlier stated validly political circumstances emanate from disagreement. Consequently the disagreement becomes the basis for politics. Such disagreements arise from basic differences of objectives, opinion, status, condition and power. People have different opinions, viewpoints and make different judgments. They differ from each other in such a variety of ways that it would be impossible to achieve agreement about everything. People disagree how the limited resources which are available to the society should be distributed.

Modebadze (2010: 39) refers to "two contradictory approaches to the understanding of politics" as he further underscores that narrowly defined, politics refers to occurrences within the state and government departments where only government officials, politicians, and political parties' members are engaged in politics. On the other side of the narrow definition, the broader conceptualization holds that politics is not confined to specific spheres, but is applicable in all the aspects of human life. The applicable connotation of politics in this article is the 'narrow' definition otherwise seen as the subsuming conceptualization because the politics of "all aspects of human life" eventually dovetail into only what the state permits and what politicians influence. Under the Spanish political economy for instance, there were the *cajas*, referring to credit institutions operated subject to similar regulations in Spain as the commercial banks in terms of engagement in financial transaction, although their mandates were more expansive (derived from their commencement as charitable financial bodies (de Andres et al., 2021: 176). The following extracts are further made from de Andres et al. (2021: 176-177) on how the management of the *cajas* became politicized:

"Regulators sought more ambitious designs of their governing boards, attempting guarantee the presence critical stakeholders. On such boards, the larger interests of society were ostensibly represented by local and regional politicians. Several studies have described the advantageous sides of inviting the politicians into boards. They assumed key roles as the legislation grants them high voting rights as representatives of public administrations and government in the *cajas*".

The politicians subsequently politicized the *cajas* and discarded the principles and theories of management. But that illustrates the upper power of politics over other societal tendencies and engagements. Acemoglu and



Robinson (2012) had even also strikingly demonstrated how politics determines what institutions a nation has. Invariably, politics influences what such institutional members do - their achievements in management - as evidenced by the fate of the Spanish cajas.

Essentially, the particular genre of management that is not in any way separable from political business is strategic management. It refers to the continuing monitoring, assessment, analysis and planning of all the requirements of an organization toward meeting its objectives and goals. Variations in business climates will accordingly need the organizations to continuously examine their plans for organizational triumph. The process of strategic management aids organizations to appraise their current situations, develop stratagems, utilize them and evaluate the efficacy of the deployed policies and practices (Alkhafaji, 1997; Courtney, 2002; Nag et al., 2007; Tucci, 2021, Indeed Editorial Team, 2021). Tucci (2021) identifies five basic approaches to strategic management: evaluating the organization's existing position; detecting and studying external and internal weaknesses and strengths; creating plans of action; executing such plans of action; and embarking on evaluation to determine the extent the plans of action have been successfully implemented and effecting desired changes when envisaged results are not being produced. Political business can also derive enduring benefits from such strategic management tendencies. In the case study country of this contribution there are apparent divergences (divorces) in these regards. The required management inclinations are only seemingly embraced in disregard, leading to disharmonies in the expected function of a management-political business nexus, which borders on consummate decision making. What then are the consequences of this disharmony in the representative political economy?

4.3. The consequences of disharmony

The management-political business divergence has primarily led to the scenario of a sleeping giant in the case study country. Principally on account of its mammoth population size (translatable to human resources endowments) and tremendous availability of natural resources, the Nigerian state is usually referred to as the giant of Africa (Ogunleye, 2008, Obaje, 2009; Zulu, 2009). There are heightened insinuations however, that this same giant has interminably gone asleep (Iwuoha, 2017; Ewalefoh, 2019; Erunke, 2020; Makinde, 2020; Nweke, 2020; Proshare, 2020; Abodunrin et al., 2021; Wachuku, 2021). Hence, in spite of her enormous potentials, the nation of Nigeria has been struggling for several decades to outgrow the protracted challenges and emerge as a powerhouse on the global stage (Wachuku, 2021). The disharmony among management theory, management practice and political business is a principal contributory factor to this failing. For instance, under Nigeria's federal character principle of public administration, a fundamental consideration in hiring an occupant of a high profile office is the state of origin of the putative expert. The candidate's state of origin takes precedence over merit and competence. And if the previous occupant of a position hailed from state A, the successor official is inevitably barred from belonging to the same state of origin despite the applicant's excellence in other prerequisites (Asaju & Egberi, 2015; Idike et al, 2019; Ejimbeonwu, 2020; Onimisi & Osasona, 2021).

The federal character "principle of management" in the country was devised to guarantee inclusivity in the nation's public sector opportunities. Ejimbeonwu (2020: 79) highlights that "the federal character principle is a policy alternative initiated by Nigerian government to ensure proper management of the public service with regards to even ethnic representation". Ethnic representation thus becomes a principle of management in these circumstances. Findings of Ejimbeonwu (2020) "revealed that there is less connection between productivity and federal character, that federal character is disastrous to productivity in Nigeria's public sector" (79). The nation's public sector is accordingly the engine room of massive corruption in the country. The incidence of public sector corruption in the national system of Nigeria is simply indefinable and gargantuan (Ani Casimir, 2014; Okolo & Raymond, 2014; Ijewereme, 2015; Ugbomhe et al.2018; Ogunlana, 2019; Kupoluyi et al.2020; Onyekwere et al. 2020; Adeleke et al. 2021).

In addition to monumental corruption, the management-political business mismatch in the nation has also yielded an ever lengthening position of massive abject poverty. Al Jazeera (2021) recounts that “forty percent of people in Nigeria live in poverty”. Citing Nigeria’s National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) Al Jazeera (2020) underscores that this number (forty percent of people in Nigeria) translates to 82.9 million people. The NBS report “about poverty and inequality covered from September 2018 to October 2019”. Then in these untoward economic paradigms there is the inflation rate also spiraling away in the country and as at March 2021 stood at 18.17%.

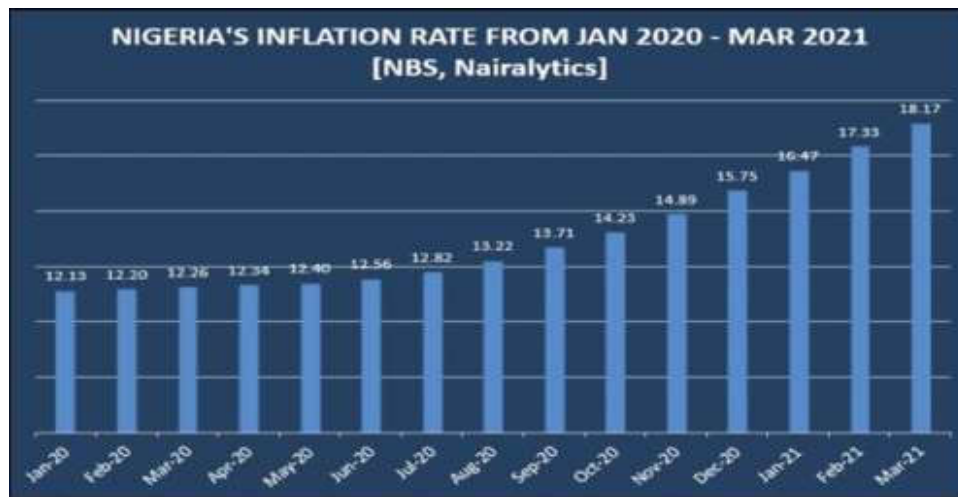


Figure 1: Nigeria’s inflation rate from Jan 2020 – Mar 2021.

Source: Oyekanmi (2021)

Oyekanmi (2021) explicates that for the month of March 2021 inflation rate in the country rose to 18.17% from 17.33% in February 2021, representing 0.82% points higher than the figures in February”. Hence, the galloping nature of the country’s inflation indicates that the purchasing power of Nigerians is dwindling. The implication is that Nigerian citizens spent more on the purchase of goods and services in the month of March 2021 than in February of the same year (while this study was being concluded). The last time the country “recorded an inflation rate higher than 18.17%, was in January 2017 when headline inflation stood at 18.72%” (Oyekanmi, 2021). These are fundamentally the downbeat results of divergences between political business and management. From the employment-unemployment trajectory of the consequences of disharmony between management and political business in Nigeria, NBS (2021) contains the following disclosures: “unemployment, 33.3%, underemployment, 22.8%, youth unemployment/underemployment, 42.5%”. These are certainly no salutary numbers for a previously acclaimed national giant. The consequences of this disharmony are indeed epitomized in the dearth of political accountability (Sule, 2021). In other words, “the existing management plans in the polity are not sustainable and effective” (Adu-Boahen, 2020: 97) and do not engender effective community building and maintenance (Chukwuere, 2020: 2).

5. RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

The paper provides new conceptual dimensions to the problems of national development in Nigeria. The divergence between management and political business, as illustrated in the work, opens new perspectives of discourse among scholars of politics and management.



6. CONTRIBUTIONS TO SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITY AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The paper reechoes the theme of ubiquity pigmentation in management theorization. Future research efforts are expected to take up the embedded latent diversities from different epistemological hues.

7. CONCLUSION

We have explored the theme of a seeming eccentricity in locating a nexus between political business and management. Political business is defined in the contribution as the important matters and affairs of civil administration or government which diverges from the notions of diminishing stock holding, tardy receivables and profit and loss accounts (P&L). It borders on consummate decision-making in a political system. To provide an empirical platform for the paper, the West African state of Nigeria was judgmentally selected. The work consequently demonstrates that political business and strategic management are inseparable. When therefore management and political business diverge in a political economy, it presents a portrait of destructive consequences and desolation. In the case study country, this has engendered a management-political business scenario of a putative giant in inelegant slumber. Finally, the contribution provides conceptual linkages in the otherwise perceived eccentricity between management and political business in the areas of decision making. Therefore, the thesis of the paper is that management theory and practice are obligatory in purposeful and effective political business.

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