

Accountability Concerns

A principal feature of bureaucracy is its top –down approach. As far as accountability is concerned, it places an awesome responsibility on the leadership of any organization. With the burden of responsibility comes the power, authority and control. Where it is a fact that bureaucracy centralizes authority, the myth must be eradicated that the power, authority and control lies in completed in the hands of one the leader. If this were so, autocratic leadership would be the norm, dictatorship would prevail and democratic institutions would be virtually none existence.

In practicing the West Minister System of governance, it is the norm that the leader takes ultimate responsibility. The bureaucracy organization structure whether in public or private sector, provides that at different levels responsibility is entrusted to an individual or group. In a corporate enterprise there is the Board of Directors along with a Chief Executive Officer and his management team which made be made up of a Human Resource Manager. At the lower level, there are those who fall in the category of supervisory management. In some enterprises the structure is a simple one, where there is the manager and supervisory management. When compared with government, there is the Prime Minister, Cabinet, Permanent Secretaries, Heads of Department and senior management personnel.

It is well known that a similar organizational structure exists in all national and community organizations, inclusive of trade unions, non-governmental organizations and political parties. There is a tendency for the public to want to hear from the leader of any organization. While there is merit in this call, it may not necessary follow that the leader in all cases is the best person to speak to any issue. If it accepted that to delegate is an important aspect of leadership, than the argument stands that those who are entrusted with the responsibility

should give account for their stewardship. The norm is that the leader of the team is to be held responsible, but good management would dictate that where circumstances warrant, the individual or individuals who are best qualified and technical competent, should take the lead in addressing matters.

In the private sector, the chief executive officer and /or the manager is answerable to the employer. By the same token, the question may be put as to whether Permanent Secretaries and Heads of Department as public sector managers should be held accountable? Further, should they be held accountable in like manner as they counterparts who occupy the role of the Chief Executive Officer or Managing Director of a statutory corporation / state owned enterprise?

In deepening the discussion on the issue of leadership and management in the public and private sectors, the fact remains that there are levels of responsibility within an organization. This means that those responsible should be held accountability to the various public in speaking to matters of concern. There may be some speculation as to which way is the best way, but it would seem that if managers are overshadowed by their employers who entrusted them to perform a managerial role, then the employer's action is tantamount to the marginalization of the manager's role. This to all intents and purpose can provide the base for a claim of micro management to be echoed.

In the bureaucratic system, it sometimes appears as if managers as workers are often made the scape goats when things go wrong in an organization. On the other hand, when things go right, there are seldom given the credit, acknowledged or given the opportunity to announce the achievement to their publics. Convenience is often exercised at the will of those who have to power and authority to do so. The bureaucratic system has built-in mechanisms to ensure

accountability, but the fact that these can be conveniently by-passed, speaks volumes to how the system can be manipulated.

In corporate organizations it is known that the chief executive officer is the accounting officer. If he/she fails to account, more than likely they are disciplined, censored or dismissed. There are those who would question why this policy is not evident within the public sector. It can be argued that there is a variation in the system of accountability, where in contrast to the private sector, public officers in executive management positions follow the bureaucratic change of command and report directly to a Minister. It is therefore reasonable to assume before any public communication is made on a matter of national interest, that the Minister is briefed by the Permanent Secretary and the members of the management team.

If this traditional approach is accepted as the norm, then it can be taken to mean that the system is working as it is intended to do. Is it reasonable to conclude that both senior managers in public administration and politicians are to be held accountable for any misgiving or failures that impact on the lives of citizens? The answer generated to this question should take into consideration the fact that public sector managers are required to provide advice, information, implement policy decisions, monitor and evaluate outcomes. This must be balanced against the fact that how far they go in taking action and implementation maybe somewhat constrained by the fact that they take instructions from the political directorate; which is ultimately responsible for decision making.