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Myths, Stereotypes and Realities of Classical Management Theories: The Quest for Equilibrium  
for School Management Effectiveness

By

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**ABSTRACT**

*The paper examined the myths, stereotypes and realities of classical management theories as related to school management effectiveness. Related literature on the origin, postulations, merits and demerits of the theories were reviewed. The paper posits that although the theories are applicable in managing most of the formal organizations, yet the school managers should be cautious in trying to make use of the theory in managing schools which are not profit-oriented organizations. As such, the paper recommends application of some of the postulations of the Scientific Management Theory among other things.*

**INTRODUCTION**

A lot has been written about classical management theories and their application in managing formal organizations, school inclusive. Intellectual discourses featuring the postulations, principles, merit, drawbacks and dynamism of these highly adored theories in organizational management and administrative effectiveness are beyond exactness. The theories in this management school of thought have been popularized, recommended and encouraged by several management scholars and practitioners to the extent that one can hardly escape the influence of these theories in the management and administrative studies. Consequently, avalanche of literatures has and are still been produced in a great number of management write-ups to the point that one can assume that there are no any other theories that are better and more relevant in the art or science of

administration. Blindfolded by the attractiveness of the postulations of the classical theories, educational management scholars persistently follow suits in recommending these theories for application in managing school organizations, disregarding the fact that the school settings might have situations in which such theories may not necessarily be of strong relevance. Thus, in spite of stream of evidences to the contrary, the impression of the significance of these theories to school management and administration continues to thrive in the write-ups of both scholars and practicing educational managers. Classical management theories accordingly are over-zealously glorified and presented in such a manner that a novice in administration may think that he can hardly record any success without the knowledge and application of these theories.

However, it is obvious that theories in general, classical inclusive, are helpful and

noteworthy if they serve to clarify practice and provide managers with a guide to action. Indeed, theories can be seen as useful for influencing practice when they suggest new ways in which events and situations can be perceived. Schools as could be observed are entities embodying the human, material and financial resources that need to be effectively utilized for the accomplishment of the goals and objectives for which they were established. This by implication means that school management like any other form of management is in need of knowledge of all the factors deemed necessary for the effectiveness of its administration. It is in this light that this paper reviews the myths, stereotype and realities of the classical management theories and tries to strike a balance between the relevance and otherwise of the theories to school organizational management effectiveness. Perhaps the best approach to understanding the subject matter of this paper is to begin with an examination of the denotations, genesis, distinctiveness and focus of these classical management theories versus their application in managing school organizations.

#### **CLASSICAL MANAGEMENT THEORIES: ORIGIN, MYTHS, STEREOTYPE AND REALITIES**

As observed by a number of writers, classical management approach is the oldest school of thought in management which started around 1900 and continued in to 1920s. In the words of Johns and Saks (2001)

*“Scientific management theory was formed in USA to increase productivity, as there was shortage of labour in USA due to industrial revolution, so it was only way to increase productivity through raising the efficiency of workers. Four principles of scientific management theory were: the development of a true science of*

most of the major advocates of the classical viewpoint were experienced managers or consultants who took the time to write down their thoughts on organizing. The writers further assert that for the most part, this activity occurred in the early 1900s. This was the period of intellectual awakening when the scientific and technological discoveries of Galileo, Watt, Gilbert and Harvey, and other prominent geniuses gave rise to the industrial revolution. (Nwachukwu 2007).

The major contributors of classical management thought according to Weihrich, Cannice and Koontz (2011) were Frederick W. Taylor 1856-1915, Frank Gilberth 1868-1924 and Lilian Gilberth 1878-1972, Henri Fayol 1841 -1925 and Max Weber 1864-1920. Classical management theories encompass scientific management theory, administrative management theory and bureaucratic management. Now for one to have clear understanding of these theories and be able to identify the myths and stereotypes associated with them a general overview is imperative.

#### **Scientific Management Theory**

Principally, scientific management theory was developed by Frederick Winslow Taylor and later improved by Frank and Lilian Gilberts. The main thrusts and focus of the theory were employee productivity, efficiency and effectiveness thus its postulations revolve around motivating factors influencing the output of employees, as observed by Mahmood, Basharat and Bashir (2012) saying that:

*management, the scientific selection and training of workers, proper remuneration for fast and high-quality work and equal division of work and responsibility between worker and manager.” P520*

Conceivably, the relevance of the theory to increasing productivity of workers in especially business and profit-making organizations was a point of no dispute among management scholars of the time when the theory was developed. Ujo (2004) states is on the view that the values of scientific management are; efficiency in production, rationality in work procedure, productivity and profit.

The fundamental principles of the theory as stipulated by Augustine and Agu (2013) include:

- a) Replacing rules of thumb with science (organized knowledge).
- b) Obtaining harmony, rather than discord in group actions.
- c) Achieving co-operation of human beings, rather than chaotic individuals.
- d) Working for maximum output, rather than restricted output.

*“The Scientific management perspective was a strong driver of efficiency for organizations and countries undergoing industrialization. Its influence was first felt in the private sector but was quickly adopted by the public sector. Scientific management contributed to the view that there is “one best way” of achieving results. Scientific management in public administration contributed to the efficient mass production of standardized public services, payments issued on time and with minimal errors, public works projects undertaken according to plan, standardized curricula in public schools, efficient tax-collection agencies free from corruption or leakage of public funds.” P 169*

However, critical examination of the origin, focus and characteristics of the theory could lead to noticing various flaws and myths in the application of the theory in managing school organizations. The point of

- e) Developing all workers to the fullest extent possible for their own and their company's interests.

Although the theory is criticized for its numerous limitations which include, assuming that employees' productivity is motivated by material reward only, presupposing that human beings could be programmed as machines to work all day long and the rest, there are other writers who view the theory as having merits and potentialities which if employed systematically could lead to realization of the desired results as viewed by Adegboye (2013) that today, some of Taylor's and Gilbreth's postulations are still globally relevant in the area of quality control especially in production based and very large manufacturing organizations around the world. In the same vein Nhema (2015) posits that;

contention here is that schools are not profit-making organizations, but rather they are service organizations that are not after drawing proceeds, thus principles and postulations developed for the purpose of

multiplying the efforts of employees for more profit could not necessarily be suitable for application in school settings that are meant to mould, train and develop human beings. More over the theory was developed for application in organizations in which there was no question of establishing cordial relationship between the management and the employees. Taylor did not feel the need to build rapport among workers. Rather, he felt that managers needed to communicate in a clear-cut and candid manner fool stop. Further, the theory assumes that employees do not need to provide any input; they just need to know how to execute their jobs. These assumptions apparently negate the norms, cultures and values of school settings in which teaching and non-teaching staffers are expected to be part and active contributors to the policies and procedures of conducting school activities for successful implementation of curricular thus making the school a conducive place for teaching and learning. Apparently, cooperation, partnership and collaborations between the management and staff in school are essential, and if the manager undermines

this fact, the end results would be devastating.

### ***Administrative Management Theory***

This theory was developed by Henry Fayol in 1916 who was a French mining engineer. He started his working career as an engineer but gradually rose to the post of managing director of the company, the position he held for over 30 years. Thus, armed with vast knowledge and experience, Fayol studied organizational structures and functions, and divided them in to six broad areas namely;

1. Technical
2. Commercial
3. Financial
4. Security
5. Accounting
6. Managerial

The sixth function (i.e. managerial function) was accorded in-depth study, the result of which was the production of the 14 principles of management which Fayol claimed to be relevant to management of all sorts of organizations as rightly pointed out by Ehiobuche and Tu (2012) saying that:

*“Henri Fayol attempted to explain what managers do and how they do it. He argued that there were universal processes and principle that could be applied in managing any type of firm. Under this approach, management was seen as a rational and orderly process and as a continuous process. Fayol established 14 universal principles for managing organizations. These fourteen principles are Division of Work, Discipline, Unity of Command, Unity of Direction, Subordination of Individuals to Generate Interest, Remuneration, Centralization, Scalar Chain, Order, Equity, Stability of Tenure, Initiative, and Esprit de corps.” P 321*

The focus of the theory as observed by Ujo (2004) is the structure of the organization rather than sociological and psychological factors relating to human behaviour. The theory also makes

assumptions and predictions on organizational climate and leadership. The principles of unity of command, unity of direction, discipline and centralization were well articulated and worthy of application.

However, it is worth noting that a number of analysts observed that the theory was more suitable to military formations rather than other types of organizations. Thus, the issue of employing the theory in school management (with exception of

military institutions) is even more remote than any other non-military settings. To writers such as Skaik (2008) Administrative theory dealt with employees as tools used to achieve the goals of organization. Akrani (2011) posits in the same vein that:

*“The administrative management theory is management oriented; it does not give much attention to the problems of the workers. The theory does not give any importance to informal organisation or groups. It gives importance only to the formal organisation structure. Some of the concepts of administrative management theory were borrowed from military science. They tried to apply these concepts to the social and business organisations. For e.g. Henri Fayol gave importance to "commanding" and not "directing" the workers. It does not deal with some of the important aspects of management such as motivation, communication and leading.”*

P<sub>1</sub>

The above drawbacks notwithstanding, a great number of merits have been recognized with the theory. For instance, analysts such as Kaur (2015) observed that administrative management theory contains some guidelines that help the administrators to follow and work according to the norms and regulation of an organization. Thus, going by the above and many other assertions, one could conclude that the management effectiveness, possibility of wide range application and the like are some of the possible merits that could be drawn from the theory.

### **Bureaucratic Management Theory**

Bureaucratic management theory was developed by Max Weber (1864-1920) who was one of the key proponents of the classical management theories. Bello (2017) sees Weber as one of the most important thinkers in modern organizational theory; saying that Weber is the father of the bureaucratic management theory. Weber was a German sociologist and political

economist that viewed bureaucracy in a positive light, believing it to be more rational and efficient than its historical predecessors. In bureaucratic organizational structures, top leaders exercise a great deal of control over organizational strategy decisions, which is ideal for business owners with a command and control style. Strategic decision-making time can be shorter in a tall organizational structure, since fewer individuals are involved in the process. Standardization and best-practices are often highlights in companies with tall organizational structures, ensuring that work is consistently completed efficiently and effectively. Hierarchy of authority, professional qualities, division of labour, rules, regulations and procedures, line of authority, unity of command, clearly defined principles of supervision and span of control are the major characteristics of bureaucratize management theory. A great number of writer believed that Max Weber was the one coined the concept of bureaucracy which he viewed as the ideals in which organizations should aim for and aspire. Weber was

influenced by socialist philosophy. He developed the idea of bureaucracy when he noticed several corrupt and unethical behaviors of leaders. He felt that organizational leaderships should center on task proficiency and impersonal relationships. Even though many people associate bureaucracy with red tape and ineffective organizations, this is not the outcome of bureaucracy. According to Weber, bureaucracy should be synonymous with order, consistency, reason, and reliability. In order to aspire to these traits,

organizations need to have specific rules and emphasize impersonality. The main focus of Weber's Theory is organizational structure. He focused on dividing organization into hierarchies and establishing strong lines of authority and control. He suggests that organization should develop comprehensive and detailed standard operating procedures to perform preplanned tasks. (Mahmood et al 2012). Nhema (2015) observes in this relation that in Bureaucratic management theory:

*“Goals are clear and explicit. Positions are arranged in pyramidal hierarchy, with authority increasing as one moves up the organization. The authority lies in the positions rather than in people who occupy them. Selection of members is based on their qualifications rather than on who they know. Promotions are based on seniority and performance. The officials working in a bureaucracy provide a continuous and neutral service essential to the proper functioning of the State.”*

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In the same vein Igram (2015) posits that bureaucratic management allows the organization to easily manage people who do repetitive tasks, like working on a manufacturing line or stocking shelves. It is a perfect management style for large companies, military organizations and government departments, who count on reliable results. Despite all these merits, the theory has a number of drawbacks which Johnson in Bello (2017) summarizes as:

1. The specialization of labor often inhibits effective communication among technical specialists and between higher and lower levels of the organization.
2. The procedures and rules sometimes encourage organizational members to act mechanically rather than exercising initiative and using their

inherent creativity. They often breed resistance to change.

3. Promotions in real life can result from “whom one knows” and “how one plays the organization game” rather from technical ability. Competent people may be denied promotion.
4. Bureaucracy involves excessive paperwork, as every decision must be put in writing. All documents have to be maintained in their draft and original forms. This leads to great wastage of time, stationery and space.
5. Personnel in a bureaucracy tend to use their positions and resources to perpetuate self-interests or the interests of their sub-units. Every superior tries to increase the number of his subordinates as if this number

is considered a symbol of power and prestige. It is hard to destroy bureaucracy even if it has outlived its utility.

6. Bureaucratic procedures involve inordinate delays and frustration in the performance of tasks. The procedures are nevertheless valued, perpetuated and multiplied for their own sake as also to pass the buck.

Now taking the above accounts on this great theory in to consideration, one could assert that despite its seemingly relevance to school management, it has many limitations that call for caution when trying to make it feasible in managing school organizations.

### ***Classical Theories and School Management Effectiveness: the quest for synergy***

Taking it from a general perspective, assertion could be made that the relevance of theories in general to organization management effectiveness is a point of contention. To some management scholars and practitioners theories (classical or otherwise) are irrelevant to practice, while others maintain that theories are very much needed for organizational management effectiveness. Thus, there is no consensus among such scholars and practitioners on whether theories are needed in managing organizations or not. It is perhaps based on A theory according to Olum (2004) is:

*“systematic grouping of interdependent concepts (mental images of anything formed by generalization from particulars) and principles (are generalizations or hypotheses that are tested for accuracy and appear to be true to reflect or explain reality) that gives a framework to, or ties together, a significant area of knowledge. Scattered data are not information unless the observer has knowledge of the theory that will explain relationships” p 9*

the above controversy that Enaohwo and Eferakeya (1989) posit that much of the skepticism among laymen about theory is based on the assumption that theory is unreal and impracticable. This line of thought has made some school managers to undermine the value, usefulness and relevance of theory in facilitating the practice of organizational management. Bush (2003) states in this relation, that the application of theories by practicing administrators (is) a difficult and problematic undertaking. He therefore concluded that it is clear that theories are simply not used very much in the realm of practice. However other scholars and practicing managers and administrators view theories as vital and relevant to organizational management practice. Thus, the avalanche views express in this supporting camp assume that the knowledge of theories of administration is fundamental as theories are meant to provide guidance for appropriate practical application in managing organizations. Trying to strike a balance between the two extremes, Bush (2003) affirms that theory may be perceived as esoteric and remote from practice, yet in an applied discipline such as educational management, the acid test of theory is it's relevant to practice. He therefore, remarks that yet the debate persists for others argue that they cannot see any good in sticking to theories.

Nwachukwu (2007) on the other hand opines that a theory is a scientifically acceptable schema useful in understanding phenomenon and predicting future happenings. The writer based on this interpretation, posits that the theory of management is the synthesis of the concepts and principles of management. Oluwuo and Akachukwu (2016) posit that a theory is a systematic grouping of related principles; management theory therefore serves as a means of classifying pertinent management knowledge. The above interpretations seem to conceptualize theory as representation of observable facts emanating from studies that are capable of explaining the relation between one management activity and another that is capable of envisaging what will happen in the future if one or more management activity is associated with another. Smith (2013) commenting on the values of theory opines that theory summarizes, subsumes research into meaningful conceptual framework (makes sense of what we know), guides future research (tells us what we need to find out) and guides practice (tells us what to do in applied situations).

Despite the numerous advantages analysts ascribe to theories and their relevance to practice, yet one could observe that there are a number of theories that do not merit total and undue patronage, the application of the classical theories could be branded part. This could be due to the fact that all the theories were not developed originally for application in service organizations such as school. School as could be observed is established principally to impart knowledge, skills, attitudes, norms, values and expertise. School as observed by

Bello (2014) is a formally organized social institution where teaching and learning takes place under the guidance of academically and professionally prepared teachers and administrators. The purpose of school therefore differs from that of profit-making organization for which the classical management theories were developed. Teaching staff, as could be deduced from the above interpretation are the operation workforce in the school, and unlike the other types of employees working in profit-making organizations, teachers serve as guides and facilitators of learning who would not be productive if coerced or firmly controlled as suggested in the assumptions of the theories. Ahmad (2011) posits in this relation that there is no betterment without teacher in the school. Proper planning and organization of teaching learning activities can only be achieved through Cooperation, willingness, involvement, fellow feelings and devotion of teachers. Advocating for participatory management in school, Stanley (2016) states that participatory management in schools promotes a feeling of honesty, fairness and obligation to work amongst teachers. This, ha continues, eventually leads to increased productivity. The dynamic nature of school organization, the value-loaded objectives set for school to accomplish, the interest stakeholders are increasingly developing in what happens in the school, the multi-facetted of school management, the ever-emerging challenges threatening school effectiveness and a host of other social, political and economic challenges facing the school manager, all put together make school management herculean that defies the boundaries of the classical management theories. Apparently, theories are useful

only when they are relevant to practice in such a way that they can influence practice and suggest new ways of doing things.

On the other hand, the theories under review contain some principles that are not in congruence with the essential needs of promoting creativity, smartness, flexibility and originality in teachers and supporting staff in the school organization. The implication here is that a school manager would find full application of these theories problematic for the simple reason that they were developed with sole purpose of maximizing profit through stringent policies that would ensure efficiency of employees which obviously contradicts the missions of school and their functions.

### ***Equilibrium for school management Effectiveness***

From the discussions above, one could infer that not all the postulations of the classical management approach possess the qualities that would make them useful in managing school organizations, thus one has to be vigilant and selective in employing these theories. Observably some of the principles of the theories in the classical management school of thought would not satisfy the needs of school administrators who are saddled with the roles of piloting this rather complex organization that aims at transforming humans into useful members of the society. The products of schools are not tangible goods but knowledgeable beings and educated workforce.

Fundamentally, this paper, does not in any way advocate for total condemnation of the entire principles and postulations of classical management theories, instead it recognizes the relevance of a number of their principles. Apparently, the ability of the

school to produce qualitative outputs hinged in the effectiveness of its structures and how well such structures and activities are managed. This therefore, brings to limelight, the significance of administrative and scientific postulations in school organizational management. Since the school management is responsible for all the teaching and supporting activities taking place in the school, the school managers should make sure that they employ all the available technical-know how at their disposal to design, organize, control, monitor and harmonize the teaching and learning activities in the school. So, the decision to select and apply any of the available principles and procedures of classical management theories, are prerogative power of the school's authority. Hence the school managers should be certain that whatever postulation they contemplate to employ from the principles of the theories under review do not contradict the negates the purpose, norms, values and traditions of school organizations. Such principles should also be in congruence with the codes governing effective and productive management of school organization. Some of the principles of the classical theories are socially biased that they are only relevance to the American industrial settings and even that are time bound, that is to say that they were only relevant to the time when they were developed i.e. the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Even at that Ehiobuche and Tu (2012) comment that the classical thinkers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century have made many valuable contributions to the theories and practices of management. However, their theories did not always achieve desirable results in the situations that were developing in the early

twentieth century. The analysts further observed that:

*“Organizations have grown more complex and hence require more creativity, ownership and judgment from each of the employees. Classical theory also assumes that all types of organizations can be managed according to one set of principles, but this need not be true in all cases. With changes in objectives, structures and environment, Organizations have made changes in principle and how organizations need to be managed efficiently and effectively for better productivity. The principles detailed by the classical theory are not vigorously scientific and also did not stand the test of time. They reflected the individual’s empirical observations and their own logical deductions and not a true scientific-based research and evidence.” P 325*

In an attempt at striking a balance between the archaic ideas of the classical theories and modern school organizational needs for relevant theoretical application, the school managers operating in this current complex competitive world should be vigilant enough to distinguish between what to be employed and what to be discarded. The implication here is that die-hard adherence to the principles of classical management theories is a harbinger of retrogression which could lead to many obnoxious consequences. In fact, one undisputable fact about organizations school inclusive, is that organizations are subject to changes and modifications, consequently all activities taking place in them are also apt to such modifications, changes, alterations and modernizations. As such all businesses meant to flourish, especially in this current world of technological development must imbibe changes otherwise face hiccups and drawbacks that may culminate to extinction. This means that the management procedures, techniques and principles we apply in our management of especially school organizations must also absorb changes and modifications.

## CONCLUSION

Despite the fact that classical management theories contain useful principles that are applicable in managing school organizations, yet there are a portion of their postulations that are not relevant today, this is because of the obvious differences between the settings for which the theories were developed and the school organizations. Some other principles of the theories could not stand the test of time thus become obsolete. New trends in organizational management, complexity of school organizations, diversity in functions and differences in purpose render the total application of the theories in school management outmoded, hence the need for alternative principles and paradigms that could suit the nature and purpose of management in the contemporary school organizations. The discussions made in this write-up future the origins, focuses, assumptions, merits and demerits of the theories as well as their application and irrelevance to the contemporary school management.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the discussions and analyses made that the following recommendations are proffered:

1. School managers should not be die-hard advocates of only classical management principles in order to avoid contradicting the laws of dynamism.
2. Contingency approach to organizational management is highly recommended for its flexibilities that are in congruence with the distinctive natures, divergent functions and unique characteristics of schools.
3. Since the goals set for school organizations to accomplish differ significantly from those of industrial and profit-oriented organizations, school managers need to be conversant with different organizational behaviours and their implication on any theory deemed applicable in school management.
4. Any postulation that negates the principles of conducive teaching and learning environments should not be employed in managing school organization.
5. School norms, values and traditions should not be compromised in the name of eliciting subordinate cooperation in the school management.

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